

The Wellness Express™

Jump on the train to good health

Issue 2, June 2011

The Vital Importance of a Healthy Liver

Presented by:

When it comes to keeping our internal organs healthy, we usually hear lots of advice for the brain and heart. We do not hear too much information on how best to take care of our liver. Although it may not have a high profile in the health media like the brain and heart do, our liver is extremely important to our survival.

The liver performs a number of important functions:

- Filters blood and remove toxins
- Produces substances important for blood clotting
- Stores nutrients for future use
- Processes medicine
- Breaks down saturated fat

With all these essential tasks, you can see how it is key for you to take good care of your liver, but how do you actually maintain the health of this organ?

In this issue of Wellness Express, we look at problems that affect the liver and lifestyle changes and herbal substances that can help protect it.

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Problems of the Liver

Your liver can be affected by a number of serious conditions.

Cirrhosis

This liver condition is the 12th leading cause of death from disease in North America. Cirrhosis is a progressive condition where scar tissue overtakes normal liver tissue. The overwhelming cause of cirrhosis is alcohol abuse, although other causes, such as hepatitis, fatty liver (*see below*) and environmental toxins, can spur cirrhosis. As the scarring destroys healthy tissue, the liver starts to malfunction. Making lifestyle and dietary changes can help slow damage. In serious cases, a liver transplant is required.

Fatty Liver Disease

This condition has seen a dramatic rise in our population, and the obesity epidemic can take part of the blame. Fatty liver occurs when this organ is overwhelmed by fat, and its proper function is affected by inflammation. Without medical intervention, this can progress to liver cirrhosis, and even life-threatening liver failure. Alcohol abuse contributes to creating fatty liver as do metabolic problems, gastric bypass surgery and some medications.

Exercise of the Week

Reverse Crunch with Exercise Ball plus Oblique Twist

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

(Consult your chiropractor before starting this or any other exercise.)

Start: Lie on back with hands behind head, elbows out. Position ball behind legs so it can be lifted off floor with hamstrings/adductors.

Exercise: Lift ball just off floor. Pull stomach inward while inhaling. As you exhale, simultaneously bring knees up toward chest and try to touch right elbow to left knee. Pause, then return to starting position. Switch sides.

Repeat 10 times.



However the increasing rate of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease – where alcohol abuse is not a factor – is often associated with excessive body fat.

Another consequence of fatty liver is the increase risk for developing type 2 diabetes. In a study published by the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, researchers discovered that people with fatty livers were five times more likely to develop this type of diabetes than those without fatty livers, and it occurred regardless of insulin levels.¹

Hepatitis

The two types of this viral infection that affect the liver most significantly are hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

Hepatitis B does not always show symptoms. It is spread through contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids. A long term infection of hepatitis B can harm the liver.

Hepatitis C is spread through blood and not by sexual contact. If an infected person progresses to the chronic type of hepatitis C, liver damage can be severe. Like hepatitis B, this type of hepatitis does not always show symptoms; the disease can easily go undiagnosed for years. Blood tests can detect hepatitis.

Giving Your Liver a Helping Hand

You can do your liver a big favor by not abusing alcohol, eating a healthy diet and keeping your weight level in an appropriate range.

Are there other ways to help keep your liver running smoothly? Health researchers have determined some herbal substances that may be beneficial for your liver.

Although they are natural, these herbal substances may react dangerously with some medications and certain health conditions. Always talk to your chiropractor before using supplements and herbal remedies.

Milk Thistle

The tall milk thistle plant has been used for medical purposes for thousands of years. Physicians in ancient Rome and Greece used the seeds from the milk thistle's fruit to detoxify the liver and to treat snake bites. Today, healthcare practitioners prescribe it for cleaning your liver and reducing damage from alcohol and some chemotherapy medications.² The most powerful therapeutic ingredient in milk thistle is silymarin, which is a robust antioxidant.

Turmeric

Part of the ginger family, turmeric is a spice widely used in India, especially in curried foods. But it also has a long history of medicinal use in India and Chinese traditional medicine. Curcumin is the active ingredient in turmeric that delivers most of this spice's medicinal properties. Like silymarin in milk thistle, curcumin is a strong antioxidant. Throughout its long medical history, turmeric was prescribed for liver disease, flushing out toxins and soothing digestive disorders. Turmeric is available in supplement form, such as capsules, tablets and tinctures.

Two recent studies show that curcumin can help slow liver damage caused by non-alcoholic steatohepatitis and cirrhosis.^{3, 4}

Quote to Inspire

“Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

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