

ALCOHOL-ASSOCIATED LIVER DISEASE (ALD)

What is alcohol-associated liver disease (ALD)?

There are over 100 types of liver disease. Alcohol-associated liver disease (ALD) is one of them. It is the type of liver disease that can happen when someone drinks more than moderate amounts of alcohol. Damage can range from mild to severe. ALD usually occurs over a long period of time, but may also be acute (sudden) in some people. People can develop ALD even if they are not alcohol dependent. Individuals who are alcohol dependent may have alcohol use disorder, which is considered to be a brain disorder. It is a medical condition characterized by an impaired ability to stop or control alcohol use and can range from mild to severe and may lead to liver disease and liver failure.

What is moderate drinking?

One serving of alcohol consists of a 12-ounce beer, a five-ounce glass of wine, or one ounce of hard liquor. For men, moderate drinking means consuming no more than two alcoholic drinks per day. For women, that amount is no more than one drink per day. Drinking higher amounts can lead to liver disease. Liver damage may also happen as a result of drinking more than four to five alcoholic beverages in a two-hour timeframe, referred to as binge drinking.

Types of ALD

There are three types of ALD:

- Alcohol-associated fatty liver disease is when extra fat builds up in the liver cells. Most “heavy drinkers” develop this condition, which can be reversed if the person stops drinking alcohol.
- Alcohol-associated hepatitis is inflammation (swelling) of the liver. Liver cells can be destroyed because of this condition, but it too may be reversed if the person stops drinking alcohol.
- Alcohol-associated cirrhosis is the most serious type of ALD. A liver with cirrhosis has become hardened with scar tissue, making it harder for the liver to function.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis includes medical history review, blood tests, scans and/or liver biopsy.

Complications

Complications can include fluid buildup in the abdomen, risk of internal bleeding, enlarged spleen, kidney failure, brain disorders, liver cancer, and coma.

Treatment

Treatment for ALD may include medications and nutrition therapy. Liver transplant may be an option for patients with advanced alcohol-associated cirrhosis. People who are alcohol-dependent should speak to their doctor about how to safely stop drinking to avoid serious withdrawal symptoms.

To learn more about ALD, scan the QR code below. For a complete list of all of our free resources, please visit: liverfoundation.org/resource-center.

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For questions about liver wellness and disease, or for emotional support to patients at the point of crisis and information on local resources including physician referrals, please contact our Helpline at 1-800-465-4837.

