

men and women's health

Our liver is not only the largest gland in the body; it is also one of the most vital. Among its major functions include digestion, metabolism and detoxification. When we eat, the liver stores the glucose in the body, releasing it only when the need arises. Aside from glucose, the liver also serves as a storage site of many vitamins and minerals. It also produces various substances that are essential to the body, an example of which is bile, a fluid secreted in the liver but stored in the gall bladder. Bile breaks down fats from the diet into smaller particles, making them easier to digest and absorb. Toxins in the body are also excreted with the help of the liver.

Although the liver has an enormous functional reserve and has the capacity to regenerate, it is not eternally enduring. Every substance that we introduce to our bodies, some of which may be harmful, goes through the liver before they are finally excreted. Thus, the liver gets its share of beating from an unhealthy lifestyle. When the liver gets damaged, almost all the vital functions of the body are also affected.

So how can you take care of your liver to avoid potentially life-threatening liver problems? Listed below are some tips that can help you keep your liver hale and hearty.

1 AVOID OR LIMIT YOUR ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION – Alcohol enormously increases the risk of having cirrhosis, especially if you are a woman. Women are said to be more susceptible to the adverse effects of alcohol on the liver. If

you drink alcohol, drink in moderation. Drinking alcohol in moderation means consuming no more than one bottle of beer, one glass (120ml) of wine or a shot (for women) or two (for men) shots of liquor per day.

2 GET SMART WITH DRUGS – Certain prescription and non-prescription drugs, when taken more than the recommended doses or in combination can damage the liver. These are called hepatotoxic drugs. Some herbal remedies as well as vitamin and mineral supplements may also be potentially toxic to the liver. The first tip goes hand in hand with this tip, as Acetaminophen can cause severe liver damage when mixed with alcohol.

3 GET VACCINATED AGAINST HEPATITIS A AND HEPATITIS B – Those at increased risk of hepatitis A (travellers, military recruits, animal handlers and day-care personnel) and Hepatitis B (health workers, IV drug users, hemodialysis patients, hemophiliacs, household and sexual contacts of hepatitis B carriers) should receive vaccines.

4 EAT A WELL BALANCED DIET AND EXERCISE – A diet low in fat, cholesterol and sodium is ideal to maintain a healthy liver. Obesity increases the risk of having non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, which can lead to cirrhosis of the liver, end stage liver disease and even liver cancer. Regular moderate exercise will also help your liver perform optimally.

5 AVOID EXPOSURES TO POLLUTANTS AND HARMFUL CHEMICALS – Fumes from paints, solvents, insecticides, fungicides and aerosol cleaners have

toxic effects on the liver. To protect you when using such harmful chemicals, wear masks when spraying aerosols. These chemicals may get absorbed into the skin, eventually ending up in your liver. So wear gloves, long sleeved shirts and a hat when using them.

6 MONITOR YOUR LIVER – If you have the signs and symptoms of liver disease, get yourself tested! Some symptoms of liver disease include yellowing of the skin (jaundice), fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting. The liver's ability to regenerate often masks the early symptoms of liver disease, so you may not notice them until the advanced stages of liver disease. This highlights the importance of monitoring the liver's function. Regular liver function tests are especially important if you have hepatitis, to monitor the progression of the disease or effectiveness of your treatment. Patients taking hepatotoxic drugs also need regular liver function monitoring, to make sure that their liver can still detoxify these drugs effectively.

Sources

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3. <http://www.mayoclinic.com>
4. <http://www.thebody.com>

Liver facts

Keeping your liver healthy

By Dr Shyneth Q Galapia

