

# EASY STEPS TO PROTECT YOUR LIVER

*Take action early to reverse the harm caused by alcohol on your liver.*



*If you consume alcohol frequently, consider participating in an **alcohol recovery programme.***

*Talk to a **NAMS doctor** for more information on ways to improve your liver health.*



*Schedule for a **liver blood test** before you leave today!*

*If you are concern about someone's or your drinking problem, **call our 24-Hours Helpline** at **6-RECOVER (6-7326837).***



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Buangkok Green Medical Park  
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Appointment Line: 6389 2200  
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All Addictions Helpline: 6-RECOVER (6-7326837)  
National Problem Gambling Helpline: 1800-6-668-668

[www.nams.sg](http://www.nams.sg)

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# HOW DOES ALCOHOL AFFECT YOUR LIVER?



NATIONAL  
ADDICTIONS  
MANAGEMENT SERVICE

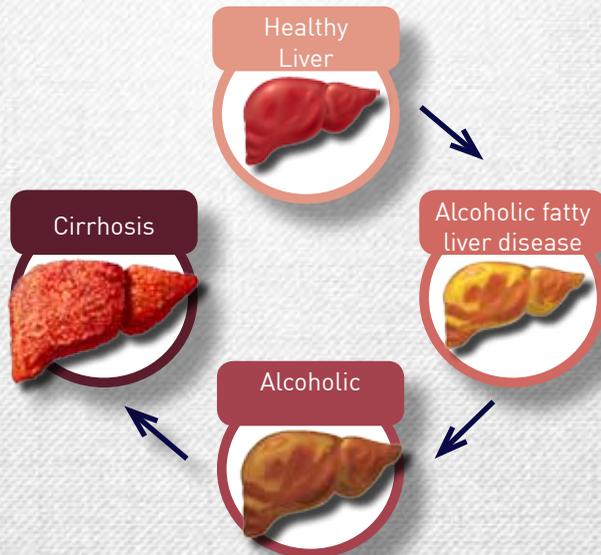
## Why is the liver important?

The liver is the second largest organ in your body and is located under your rib cage on the right. The liver performs many functions in your body. It processes what you eat and drink into energy and nutrients that your body can use. The liver also removes harmful substances from your blood. Alcohol, when taken in excessive amounts, can affect liver function.

## Alcohol Use and Liver Health

The liver is the only organ in your body that can metabolise alcohol. The liver can develop new cells, but prolonged alcohol misuse (drinking too much) over the years can reduce its ability to regenerate. This can result in serious and permanent damage to your liver.

## Stages of Alcohol-Related Liver Diseases (ARLD)



## DO YOU KNOW?

- *Men should drink no more than two standard drinks a day, and women, no more than one.*
- *A standard drink is defined as one can of regular beer (330ml), half glass of wine (175 ml) or 1 nip of spirit (35 ml).*
- *Alcohol contains many calories. 1 gram of alcohol contains 7 calories (lesser than fats).*

Source: Health Promotion Board website

## Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease

- Results from the decomposition of fats in liver cells
- Earliest stage of alcohol-related liver disease
- There are usually no symptoms
- Many heavy drinkers have fatty liver disease
- Alcoholic fatty liver disease may be reversed by abstaining from alcohol

## Alcoholic Hepatitis

- Characterised by fat deposition in liver cells, inflammation and mild scarring of the liver
- Symptoms: loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, fever and jaundice
- Up to 35% of heavy drinkers develop alcoholic hepatitis and of these, 55% already have cirrhosis (scarring of the liver caused by long-term liver damage)
- Mild alcoholic hepatitis may be reversed with alcohol abstinence.
- Severe alcoholic hepatitis may occur suddenly and lead to serious complications including liver failure and death

## Alcoholic Liver Cirrhosis

- The most advanced type of alcohol-related liver disease which is not reversible with alcohol abstinence
- Refers to a shrunken, scarred and hardened liver with failure of liver function
- Between 10-20% of heavy drinkers develop cirrhosis
- However, abstinence may improve the symptoms and signs of liver disease and prevent further damage

## How does Alcohol-Related Liver Disease (ARLD) progress?

Among many heavy drinkers, fatty liver disease can progress to alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis over time. Alcohol consumption may worsen liver injury caused by non-alcoholic liver diseases such as chronic hepatitis C.

## What are the complications of ARLD?

Complications from ARLD usually occur after many years of heavy drinking. The complications can be serious:

- Fluid build up and painful swelling of the legs (edema) and abdomen (ascites)
- Dilated blood vessels on the upper chest and arms
- Enlarged spleen
- Drowsiness and confusion due to inability of the liver to break down toxins in the blood
- Swollen veins in the esophagus and stomach that develop due to constriction of blood flow in the liver
- Vomiting of blood or passing of black stools due to bleeding from ruptured veins
- Development of liver cancer

## How is ARLD diagnosed?

ARLD may be suspected based on a person's history of alcohol abuse, laboratory or radiologic abnormalities or medical conditions related to alcohol abuse. Results of blood tests may be used to rule out other liver diseases.

## How is ARLD treated?

Treatment for ARLD requires having a healthy diet which includes stopping alcohol consumption. Your doctor may suggest changes to your diet to help your liver recover from the alcohol-related damage. Treatment may require you to participate in an alcohol recovery programme. Medication may be needed to manage complications caused by liver damage.