Hepatitis C and Cirrhosis; Stages of Liver Damage

July 20, 2020 By Connie M. Welch

Battle scars from hepatitis C. At times they can leave scars after going through a long journey with hepatitis C. No doubt each Hepatitis C patient transforms into a warrior on many fronts. Having hepatitis C is one of the leading causes for cirrhosis, cancer and liver transplants.

It's important to note, there are improved treatments for the Hepatitis C virus today with up to a 99% cure rate with shorter treatment time and less side effects than older treatments just a few years ago, but treatment for hepatitis C does not cure cirrhosis. Often times you can have Hepatitis C and not have any symptoms until extensive damage is done. Treatment for Hepatitis C can lead to elimination (cure) of the virus thus stopping the virus itself from causing further damage to the liver.

In many cases the liver can regenerate new healthy liver tissue from mild liver damage even to stages of fibrosis (the precursor to cirrhosis), as long as the hepatitis C virus or other liver damage causes are eliminated from doing further damage.

Not all hepatitis C patients experience cirrhosis, but those who've had the Hep C virus for an extended time have a higher risk of severe scarring (cirrhosis), cancer and liver transplant. Regardless of the length of time a patient has had hepatitis C, they need to be checked for liver damage.

Stages of liver damage can range from Mild Inflammation to Fibrosis to Cirrhosis (severe scarring).

Inflammation means in the early stages of liver disease, the liver can become inflamed, becoming tender and enlarged. Inflammation shows that your liver is trying to fight an infection or heal from injury. But if the inflammation continues over time, it can damage your liver progressively and not allow it to function properly. This can lead to permanent scarring and a life threatening condition. Majority of times, an inflamed liver may cause no symptoms while liver damage continues. But if the liver disease is diagnosed and treated successfully at this stage, the liver can repair from the inflammation without interrupting liver function.

Fibrosis means if liver disease is left untreated, the inflamed liver tissue will begin to scar until it continues to grow scar tissue forming fibrous tissue. Scar tissue compromises liver function, and keeps blood from flowing through your liver properly. If liver disease continues to do damage, the

scarring can progress to permanent or severe scarring as in cirrhosis. But if your liver disease is diagnosed and treated successfully, thus stopping further damage from occurring, even at this state of fibrosis, your liver can regenerate healthy liver tissue and heal over time.

Cirrhosis means if liver disease is left untreated, your liver can become so severely scarred it can no longer function properly or heal itself. This stage is often permanent and cannot be reversed. Cirrhosis can often lead to many complications including liver cancer and liver transplant. Often patients don't recognize they have a problem until symptoms become noticeable. Cirrhosis can progress to other complications such as liver cancer or liver failure where the liver is no longer able to function.

Liver failure means symptoms and scarring from cirrhosis can continue until the liver is no longer able to function and the patient can slip into a coma which is life threatening. Liver damage can progress to the stage a patient must have a liver transplant in order to survive.

Next we'll be following up with Hepatitis and Cirrhosis: Symptoms and What Helps where we discuss in detail the symptoms, complications and list of what makes the difference in living with cirrhosis.

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