When Liver Disease and COVID-19 Converge

April 27, 2020 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people with chronic liver disease may have a higher risk of severe disease if they contract COVID-19. The CDC states, "Severe illness caused by COVID-19 and the medications used to treat some severe consequences of COVID-19 can cause strain on the liver, particularly for those with underlying liver problems. People living with serious liver disease can have a weakened immune system, leaving the body less able to fight COVID-19."

Sometimes we don't know what to do with information like this, so we just worry more and hope we don't get coronavirus. However, there are some things we can do to minimize our risk of acquiring COVID-19 and severe complications if we do get it.

Get the facts. A reader asked me if she was at increased risk. Like me, her hepatitis C was cured years ago. She didn't have cirrhosis or any other liver diseases. In short, having had hep C does not mean you have liver disease; it means you had liver disease, unless of course, you weren't treated until the hep C had already damaged your liver.

Does this mean she isn't at increased risk of complications from COVID-19? Possibly, at least from the standpoint of her liver. However, I am not her medical provider, who is the right person to address this with. Even if her liver is fine, she may have other risk factors, such as her age.

Follow recommended precautions. The woman who contacted me asked if she could go out in public. Again, I don't know what guidelines are in place for her state, county or city, but as of now, there are strict procedures for how we conduct ourselves in public. Your state and local governments and public health departments can help guide you through this process.

Protect yourself. Regardless of risk factors, be sure you practice techniques designed to protect you and others. I wash my hands with the mindful attention I would use if I was performing brain surgery. There is too much at stake, and acting casually can lead to disastrous consequences.

If you have liver disease, check in with your medical provider. Don't let fear cause you to neglect your health. Naturally, most of us want to avoid going to medical offices, clinics and hospitals, but your medical provider can help you stay safe and healthy if you do need to be seen. Many providers are using telemedicine to see patients. Some have very strict protocols for maintaining

distance between patients. Click here to read what the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) says about treating patients with advanced liver disease. To read more about liver disease and coronavirus from EASL, click here,

Take care of all of you, not just your liver. The best way to take care of your liver is to take care of your whole body, including mind and spirit. We can maximize our immune systems by eating well, getting enough sleep, finding ways to exercise, and keeping stress to a minimum. Yes, this is easier said than done. However, many of us have a lot of time on our hands, and why not put that time to good use by devoting extra time to our health.

If you want to read more about COVID-19 or other health-related issues, I am also blogging at LucindaPorterRN.com.

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