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Cancer of the Liver and Intrahepatic Bile Duct

What should people know about cancer of the liver and intrahepatic bile duct?

The liver is one of the most important organs of the body. It stores **nutrients**, produces bile which is needed for digestion, and helps the body process the foods we eat. The liver also breaks down many drugs and chemicals that would be dangerous if they built up in the body.

Because it functions as a filter for the body, many other types of cancer (such as colon cancer and breast cancer) frequently spread to the liver. This is called **metastasis**. The maps in this booklet show only those cases of cancer which began in the liver. Cases of cancer which began in other parts of the body and spread to the liver are not included in these maps.

Each year in New York State, almost 600 men and 350 women are diagnosed with cancer of the liver. More than 500 men and 330 women die from the disease each year.

What are the signs and symptoms of cancer of the liver?

Early in the disease, liver cancer does not show any obvious signs or symptoms. As the tumor grows, symptoms may develop. The most common symptoms include:

- loss of appetite and weight loss
- fever
- fatigue and weakness
- pain in the upper right abdomen
- abdominal swelling or a feeling of fullness/bloating
- **jaundice**.

Who gets cancer of the liver?

Cancer of the liver is more common in older people.

Over half of people newly diagnosed with liver cancer in New York State are age 65 and over. Liver cancer is more common in men than in women. It also occurs more frequently among African-Americans than among whites.

What causes cancer of the liver?

At this time, scientists do not know exactly what causes cancer of the liver. There are several different types of liver cancer. The most common type is associated with long-term excessive alcohol consumption, scarring of the liver (**cirrhosis**) and **Hepatitis** B virus or Hepatitis C virus infection. Long-term use of **anabolic steroids** can also increase the risk of getting liver cancer.

Studies show that workers exposed to vinyl chloride during the manufacturing of some plastics have an increased risk of getting liver cancer. Eating foods contaminated with **aflatoxins** caused by improper storage also increases the risk of liver cancer. However, in the United States, the Food and Drug Administration monitors the quality and safety of foods and products which may develop aflatoxins.

What does it mean when something "is associated with" liver cancer?

It means that there is a link between the two, but there is no proof of cause and effect. More research needs to be done before we know for certain.

What can I do to reduce my chances of getting liver cancer?

You can reduce your risk of getting liver cancer by consuming alcoholic beverages only in moderation. Vaccination to prevent Hepatitis B is an important prevention measure. Also, if you work in a high risk occupation, be aware of the health and safety rules and follow them.

Nutrients - Proteins, minerals, carbohydrates, vitamins and fats - the substances necessary for growth and maintaining life.

Metastasis - When a cancer spreads to other parts of the body forming other tumors it is called metastasis.

Jaundice - A condition in which a person's skin and the whites of their eyes become yellow and their urine becomes dark.

Cirrhosis - A progressive disease that causes the liver to scar and stop functioning correctly. It is often caused by long term alcohol consumption and/or long term damage to the liver due to infections or hepatitis.

Hepatitis - Inflammation of the liver, often caused by viral infection, but sometimes due to toxic agents.

Anabolic steroids - Drugs that increase muscle mass, sometimes used illegally by athletes to improve performance.

Aflatoxins - A group of chemicals that are produced by a mold. Aflatoxins sometimes contaminate certain foods.

Liver Cancer Signs and Symptoms

Jaundice.

Dark colored urine.

Loss of appetite.

Weight loss.

Fever.

Fatigue.

Weakness.

Pain in upper right abdomen.

Lump in the upper abdomen.

Abdominal swelling.

Feeling of fullness or bloating.

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