The Liver

The liver is a large organ in the upper right part of the abdominal cavity. A healthy liver metabolizes proteins, carbohydrates, and fats. Also, it makes a digestive fluid (bile) and removes blood toxins.

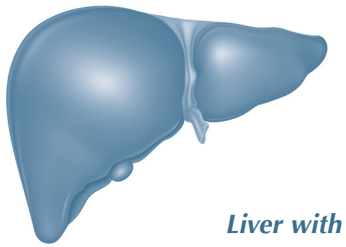
When You Have Cirrhosis

Your liver becomes damaged and scarred when you have cirrhosis. And the liver does not function as it should. In some cases, cirrhosis can lead to liver failure. If it does, your doctor will tell you whether you may need a liver transplant.

What You Can Do

If the causes of cirrhosis are not treated, your liver problem may worsen over time. And it can lead to severe liver damage or failure. That is why you need prompt diagnosis and treatment. Visit your doctor regularly. And get the support you need from family and friends.

Healthy Liver



Liver with Cirrhosis

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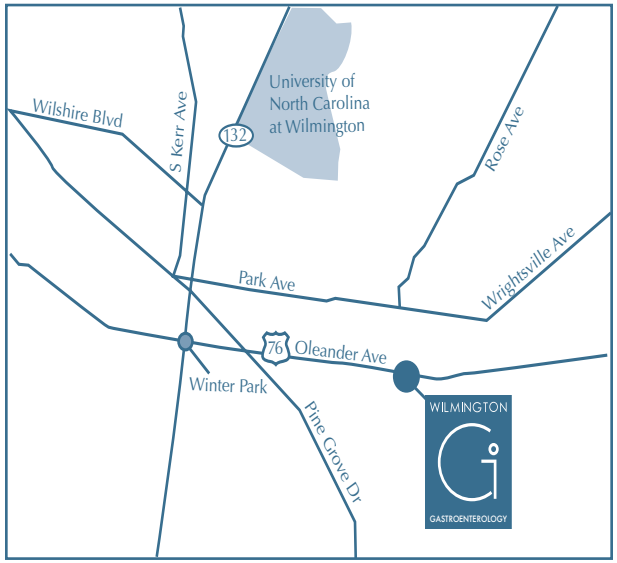

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CIRRHOSIS

A Chronic Liver Problem

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What is Cirrhosis?

Cirrhosis is a chronic (long-lasting) liver problem. It results from damaged and scarred liver tissue. Cirrhosis can't be cured, but it can be treated. The earlier cirrhosis is diagnosed, the greater the change that treatment can help.

Common Signs and Symptoms

With cirrhosis, you may have any of the following:

- Fatigue, weakness, and lack of appetite
- Vomiting with or without blood
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Yellowish skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Itching
- Swollen abdomen and legs
- Intestinal bleeding
- Easy bruising of the skin
- Dilated veins in the esophagus and stomach
- Poor mental function

Causes of Cirrhosis

Cirrhosis has a number of causes including:

- Alcohol use
- Viral liver infections, such as hepatitis
- Chronic bile duct blockage
- Certain inherited diseases that can result in too much copper or iron being stored in the liver
- Certain medications

Your Evaluation

An evaluation helps your doctor find the cause of your liver problem. You may have a health history, an exam, and some tests.

Health History and Physical Exam

Your doctor may ask you about your health and symptoms. You may be asked about your diet, lifestyle, and any medications you take. Your doctor may examine you to look for signs of cirrhosis. These include yellowing of the skin and eyes, and easy bruising of the skin.

Special Tests

To confirm whether you have cirrhosis, your doctor may order one or more of these tests:

- **Blood tests** to check clotting, to rule out infections, and to assess blood levels of copper, iron, proteins, and enzymes
- **X-ray, ultrasound, or CT (computerized tomography) imaging tests** to see the size, shape, and texture of your liver
- **A liver biopsy** to obtain and examine a small sample of liver tissue
- **An upper endoscopy** to check for dilated veins in the esophagus and stomach

Your Treatment

Treatment can control or slow down liver scarring. Follow your doctor's instructions. Your treatment plan may include medications and some lifestyle changes, such as avoiding alcohol.

Making a Treatment Plan

You and your doctor will decide on a treatment plan that's best for you. This may include:

- Medications to treat infection and any bile duct blockage, and to improve blood clotting
- A reduced-salt diet and "water pills" (diuretics) to reduce any swelling in the abdomen or legs
- Certain foods to reduce protein levels in your digestive tract
- Removal of iron from the blood to decrease iron levels in liver tissue, if needed

Severe cases of cirrhosis may need special treatments. Your doctor can discuss them with you.