

FACT SHEET EIGHT

THE LIVER

The liver is the largest internal organ in the human body weighing around 3 pounds, it lies in the upper right hand side of the abdomen. The liver has over 500 different functions, all of which are essential to life, including:

- Production of enzymes and other important proteins
- Removing poisons and waste
- Storage of iron
- Storage of glycogen
- Production of blood clotting substances
- Storage of vitamins and other nutrients
- Digestion of fats

The Liver has amazing powers of regeneration, it can repair damage caused by short-term injury or disease and can continue to carry out all of its important jobs when only a small portion of it is working.

Alcohol Related Liver Disease

Alcoholic Hepatitis is alcohol-induced inflammation of the liver, but with little structural damage, symptoms include fever, jaundice, nausea and appetite loss.

Fatty liver is caused by the accumulation of fat in the liver, but this condition is reversible. Excess fat can cause jaundice and occasionally liver failure.

Liver cirrhosis is the fifth most common cause of death amongst adults between the ages of 25 and 65. 65% of liver cirrhosis cases are as a result of the toxic effect of alcohol on the liver, which causes the cells to die and leaves a scarring (cirrhosis). Liver failure will develop as the scarring (cirrhosis) progresses. The damage caused may be reversible in some cases, but is most frequently stabilised if the condition is not too far advanced, and the individual abstains from alcohol.

Pancreatitis can be caused by a lack of blood to the pancreas due to blockages within the liver as a result of alcohol misuse. The key to pancreatitis is characterised by a sudden and severe abdominal pain, with vomiting and resulting shock. It carries a mortality rate of up to 40%. Chronic pancreatitis is characterised by pain caused by the gradual destruction of the pancreas. This can lead to malnutrition or a form of diabetes.

People who have consumed large amounts of alcohol are encouraged to have a Liver Function Test (LFT). This involves taking a small sample of blood, which is then sent away for laboratory analysis. An LFT does not involve taking a sample of your liver.

If you would like more information about LFT's please see Fact Sheet 40, if you have had an LFT and you are unclear about the results, or would like further advice and information – please call **0845 7626316** and press 1.