Chronic Liver Disease

Introduction

Chronic liver disease is a progressive and gradual destruction of liver tissue and regeneration of the liver parenchyma leading to fibrosis and cirrhosis over time. Because of the chronic damage to the liver, scar tissue slowly replaces normal functioning of liver tissue, progressively diminishing blood flow through the liver. As the normal liver tissue is lost, nutrients, hormones, drugs and poisons are not processed effectively by the liver. In addition, protein production and other substances produced by the liver are diminished.

Fibrosis is the growth of scar tissue due to infection, inflammation, injury or even healing. Fibrosis in the liver can inhibit the organ's proper functioning. Liver fibrosis is usually the result of Liver sirrhosis.

Signs & Symptoms

The symptoms of the liver cirrhosis vary, depending on severity of the condition. Following is the list of most common symptoms of cirrhosis:

- Ascites (fluid buildup in the abdominal cavity)
- Abnormal nerve function
- Vomiting with blood
- Gallstones
- Hair loss
- Itching
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- Kidney failure
- Liver encephalopathy
- Muscle loss
- Loss of appetite
- Portal hypertension
- Redness of palms
- Spider like veins in the skin
- Weakness
- Weight loss

The symptoms of cirrhosis may resemble other medical conditions or problems. Always consult your doctor for a diagnosis.

Causes

The most common cause of chronic liver disease is alcohol abuse.

Various causes of Chronic Liver Disease include:

- Hepatitis virus (B, C)
- Cytomegalo virus
- Epstein Barr Virus
- Use of certain drugs:
    - Amiodarone
    - Methotrexate
    - Nitrofurantoin
- Auto-immune diseases
- Obstruction of outflow of blood from the liver (budd-chiari syndrome)
- Malnutrition
- Heart and blood vessel disturbances
- Glycogen storage disease
- Cystic fibrosis
- Hereditary accumulation of too much copper (Wilson disease) or iron (hemochromatosis)
- Chemical exposure

Risk Factors

- Hepatitis virus
- Exposure to body fluids and infected blood
- Tattoos and body piercing
- High level of fat in blood
- Sharing infected needle and syringes
- Obesity
- Unprotected sex and multiple sex partners
- Working with toxic chemicals without wearing safety clothes
- Hereditary
- Long term alcohol consumption
- Over dose of certain drugs

Complications

- Infection in the abdominal cavity known as peritonitis
- Intestinal obstruction can cut off blood supply to certain part of the intestine which causes the intestinal tissues to die this will result in perforation and can lead to infection

Diagnosis

Liver function tests: A special blood tests to determine if the liver is functioning properly.

Liver biopsy: In this procedure a tissue samples from the liver are collected with a needle during minor surgical procedure for examination under a microscope.

CT scan: Computerised Tomographic Scan is a diagnostic imaging procedure that uses combination of x ray and computer technology to produce horizontal or axial images of the body. CT scans are more detailed compared to general x rays.

Cholangiography: X ray examination of the bile ducts using an intravenous dye called contrast media.

Ultrasound (sonography): It is a diagnostic imaging technique which uses high frequency sound waves and a computer to create images of blood vessels, tissues and organs. Ultrasound is mainly used to view internal organs of the abdomen such as the liver, spleen and kidneys and to assess blood flow through various vessels.

Treatment

Specific treatment for cirrhosis will be determined by your doctor based on:

- Your age, overall health, and medical history
- Extent of the disease
- Your tolerance for specific medications, procedures, or therapies
- Expectations for the course of the disease
- Your opinion or preference

Cirrhosis is a progressive liver disease, and damage sustained to the liver is irreversible. However, with proper nutrition, avoidance of certain toxins (such as alcohol), vitamin supplementation, and management of cirrhosis complications, further liver damage can often be delayed or stopped. In severe cases of cirrhosis, liver transplantation may be considered.