

Liver Cancer

Liver cancer usually begins in the tissues or nodules of the liver, but can also occur within cells of the liver bile ducts. The most common form of liver cancer is hepatocellular carcinoma. The exact causes of liver cancer are not fully understood. Some symptoms for early liver cancer are similar to other cancers and non-cancer related illnesses, which can make liver cancer difficult to detect and diagnose.

Statistics

- In 2021, approximately **42,230 new cases** of liver cancer are expected to be diagnosed and approximately **30,230 people are expected to die** from liver cancer in the United States.
- In Texas, **4,146 people are expected to be diagnosed** with liver cancer and an estimated **2,782 will die** from the disease in 2021.
- Liver cancer is a **leading cause of cancer-related deaths globally**, accounting for **more than 700,000 deaths** annually.
- Liver cancer **incidence and death rates are on the rise**, with the incidence **more than tripling** since 1980.

Risk Factors

- **Cirrhosis and Alcohol:** Many people who develop liver cancer show signs of cirrhosis, a disease that scars the liver. Liver cells that are damaged from cirrhosis demonstrate a greater risk of developing liver cancer. Heavy alcohol use is a leading cause of cirrhosis.
- **Obesity:** Being very overweight increases the risk of liver cancer.
- **Long-Term Hepatitis Infections:** Hepatitis B and C virus infections left untreated over an extended period of time can lead to cirrhosis. These strains of hepatitis spread through unprotected sex, used needles, tattooing, and childbirth.
- **Diabetes:** People with type 2 diabetes, especially those who consume high amounts of alcohol or have viral hepatitis, face an increased risk for liver cancer.
- **Exposure:** People who are exposed to Thorotrast, vinyl chloride, anabolic steroids, and aflatoxins have an increased risk of liver cancer.
- **Tobacco Use:** Liver cancer risk is higher in current smokers than former smokers, but both have elevated risk.
- **Gender:** Liver cancer is more common in men.
- **Inherited Diseases:** Hereditary hemochromatosis, tyrosinemia, alpha1-antitrypsin deficiency, porphyria cutanea tarda, glycogen storage diseases, and Wilson disease increase risk of liver cancer.

Symptoms

Liver cancer is difficult to diagnose because symptoms often do not appear until the disease has progressed to later stages. Symptoms may include:

- Fatigue or weakness
- Unexplained weight loss
- Hard lump under ribs on right side
- Yellow eyes and skin
- Pain in right shoulder blade or abdomen, where liver is located, or back
- Bloating, fluid build-up, or swelling in the abdomen
- Nausea or vomiting
- Unusual bruising or bleeding
- Enlarged liver or spleen
- No appetite or feelings of fullness
- Itching
- Pale stools or dark urine
- Fever

Prevention

Limiting certain risk factors and taking proactive measures can decrease the incidence of liver cancer. To reduce the risk of the disease, men and women should limit alcohol and tobacco use, maintain a healthy weight, treat cirrhosis and other diseases that increase risk in the early stages, and avoid exposure to certain chemicals and toxins. It is also important to prevent contact with the hepatitis B and C viruses. The hepatitis B virus vaccination is recommended for all infants, children, and high-risk adults.

Treatment Options

Treatment options vary, depending on the liver's condition, the age and overall health of the patient, and the size, location, and stage of the cancerous tumor. Treatment for liver cancer may include a combination of surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, cryosurgery, proton therapy, radiofrequency ablation, tumor embolization, or palliative therapy. In rare cases, a liver transplant may be appropriate.

About Texas Oncology

Texas Oncology is an independent private practice with more than 500 physicians and 210 locations across the state. Meeting the oncology needs of Texans for more than 35 years, the practice includes Texas Center for Proton Therapy, Texas Breast Specialists, Texas Oncology Surgical Specialists, Texas Urology Specialists, and Texas Center for Interventional Surgery. As a lead participant in US Oncology Research, Texas Oncology played a role in the development of more than 100 FDA-approved therapies. For more information, visit www.TexasOncology.com.

Sources: American Cancer Society, American Liver Foundation, American Society of Clinical Oncology, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Cancer Institute, and Texas Cancer Registry

