

# Liver Cancer

Primary liver cancer begins in the tissues of the liver or the bile ducts within the liver. Cancer that does not originate in the liver but spreads or metastasizes from another part of the body to the liver is considered secondary or metastatic cancer, not primary liver cancer. The most common form of primary liver cancer in adults is hepatocellular carcinoma. 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 2024, approximately **41,630 new cases** of liver cancer are expected to be diagnosed and approximately **29,840 people are expected to die** from liver cancer in the United States.
- In Texas, **4,210 people are expected to be diagnosed** with liver cancer and an estimated **2,960 will die** from the disease in 2024.
- Globally, liver cancer accounts for more than 700,000 deaths each year and is a **leading cause of cancer-related deaths**.
- Liver cancer **incidence and death rates are on the rise**, with the incidence **more than tripling** since 1980.

## Risk Factors

- **Cirrhosis and Alcohol:** Heavy alcohol use is a leading cause of cirrhosis, a disease that scars the liver. Many people who develop liver cancer show signs of cirrhosis. Liver cells that are damaged from cirrhosis demonstrate a greater risk of developing liver cancer.
- **Obesity:** Being very overweight increases the risk of liver cancer. Non-alcoholic steatohepatitis, a subtype of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease associated with overweight and obesity as well as other factors, can develop into cirrhosis and liver cancer.
- **Long-Term Hepatitis Infections:** Hepatitis B and C viral infections, if left untreated over an extended period, can lead to cirrhosis. These strains of hepatitis can spread through unprotected sex, sharing needles, or from mother to child during pregnancy.
- **Diabetes:** People with type 2 diabetes, especially those who also consume high amounts of alcohol or have viral hepatitis, face an increased risk for fatty liver disease, cirrhosis, and liver cancer.
- **Exposure:** People who are exposed to certain chemicals or eat food contaminated with 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 the risk of liver cancer.

## Symptoms

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

- Fatigue or weakness
- Unexplained weight loss
- Lump under ribs on right side
- Yellow eyes and skin
- Pain in the right shoulder blade, back, or abdomen, where liver is located
- Bloating, fluid buildup, 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

Taking proactive measures to limit risk factors can decrease the incidence of liver cancer. To reduce the risk of liver cancer, men and women should avoid tobacco and limit alcohol use, maintain a healthy weight, avoid exposure to certain chemicals and toxins, and seek early treatment for viral hepatitis, cirrhosis, fatty liver disease, and other diseases that increase risk. It is also important to prevent contact with the hepatitis B and C viruses as best as possible. 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 medicine. In rare cases, a liver transplant may be appropriate.

## About Texas Oncology

With more than 530 physicians and 280 locations, Texas Oncology is an independent private practice, a member of The US Oncology Network, that sees more than 71,000 new cancer patients each year. Founded in 1986, Texas Oncology provides comprehensive, multidisciplinary care, and includes Texas Center for Proton Therapy, Texas Breast Specialists, Texas Colon & Rectal Specialists, Texas Oncology Surgical Specialists, Texas Urology Specialists and Texas Infusion and Imaging Center. Texas Oncology's robust community-based clinical trials and research program has contributed to the development of more than 100 FDA-approved cancer therapies. Learn more at [TexasOncology.com](https://www.texasoncology.com).

*Sources: American Cancer Society, American Liver Foundation, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and National Cancer Institute*



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