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 chance 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

If your doctor suspects cirrhosis, blood tests may be done.
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.

Avoiding Alcohol
Alcohol use can destroy liver cells. If you have problems quitting alcohol, get the support you need. Your doctor may be able to suggest local groups that can help you stop drinking alcohol.
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 doesn’t 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’s why you need prompt diagnosis and treatment. Visit your doctor regularly. And get the support you need from family and friends.