

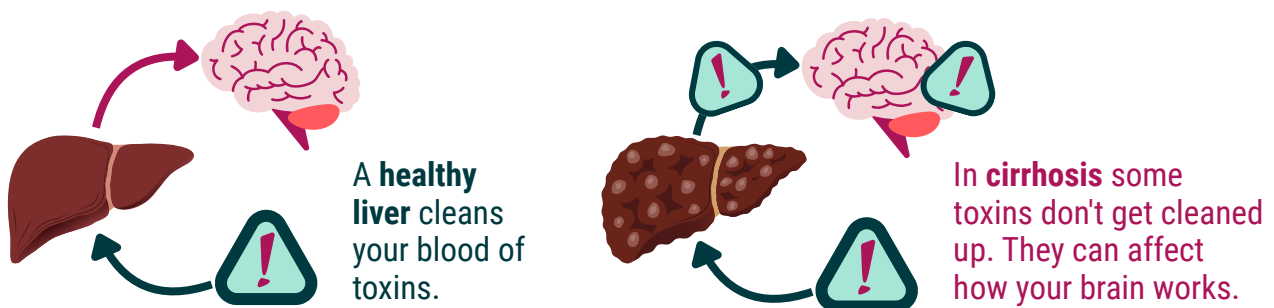
HE or hepatic encephalopathy

say **hep-a-tick en-sef-a-lop-a-thee** or **en-kef-a-lop-a-thee**.

Most people call it HE.

HE is a condition where liver disease causes changes in how the brain works. It ranges from mild to serious.

HE is usually due to damage and scarring in your liver. This is a stage of liver disease called cirrhosis (say **si-row-sis**).



An episode of HE is usually triggered by something. For example:

- problems pooing, like watery poo (diarrhoea) or not being able to go (constipation)
- an infection
- bleeding inside (this can happen in people with liver disease)
- having surgery or taking some medicines

How is an episode of HE treated?

Your doctor will do tests to find out what triggered your HE. Treating the trigger will help stop the HE. Your doctor will talk to you about how they think you should be treated.

You might also have treatment to get rid of the toxins from your blood. Or treatment to get the levels of fluid and salts in your body back to normal. HE can be a medical emergency. You will have any other treatment you need. This will depend on what has happened.

What can I do to help myself?

Eating well helps your gut reduce toxin levels. You can ask to be referred to a dietitian. People with cirrhosis should have a high protein, high energy (calorie) diet. Eat little and often. Have 4 to 5 smaller meals plus a bedtime snack.

What other treatment might I have for HE?

You will usually be given medicine to stop you having HE again. Each time someone has an episode of HE it can add more damage. Medicines for HE help your gut work better. This lowers the amount of toxins in your blood, so there's less chance of HE. The main aim is for you to do 2 to 3 soft poos a day.

Most people take **lactulose** and some people take lactulose and **rifaximin**. You will probably need to take the medicine for a long time. Tell your doctor about any side effects and how much they affect your day-to-day life. **It is very important to follow your doctor's instructions for taking your HE medicine. If you stop or regularly miss doses, you could have HE again.**

Looking out for symptoms

It is important to tell your doctor if you think you are having an episode of HE. They can often treat it quickly, for example by changing your medicines. Early symptoms include confusion, forgetfulness and mood changes. Ask for a full list of symptoms to look out for. Sometimes it's easier for your family to notice the symptoms, so let them know too. **HE can be a medical emergency, but this is rare.** Go to A&E and tell them you have liver cirrhosis and HE if you get severe symptoms including:

- very odd and unusual behaviour
- generally not responding to surroundings
- confusion and not knowing where you are
- seizures
- going into a coma

How we can help: Find out more about the support we offer at liveruk.org/support or call our nurse-led helpline: **0800 652 7330**



More information about cirrhosis and liver disease

Cirrhosis has lots of causes. It is a serious condition. People can live for years with cirrhosis and may not have any symptoms. Treatment can help to manage cirrhosis, stop it getting worse and keep you as healthy as possible. Your doctors and nurses can help you understand what's happening. HE symptoms might make this hard. Take information at your own pace. You could ask people to write things down or use a smartphone to record things.



For more information about Hepatitis A and links to support visit liveruk.org/cirrhosis-info or scan the QR code.

