

Acute on chronic liver failure

Acute means sudden and chronic means long term. So acute on chronic liver failure is when long-term liver disease suddenly gets worse and the liver starts to fail.

Acute on chronic liver failure is usually triggered by something. But in about half of cases doctors don't know what the trigger is. The 3 main triggers are:

- New liver damage, for example side-effects from a medicine or damage from drinking a lot of alcohol.
- A new infection or a flare up of a long-term infection such as viral hepatitis.
- A medical procedure that affects blood pressure and circulation.

Liver failure doesn't just affect the liver. The liver has lots of important jobs. So when it stops working it can affect other organs too, such as the kidneys, lungs and brain.

Acute on chronic liver failure is very serious and some people die from it. In some cases, supportive care can help the liver recover. And some people may be able to have a liver transplant. Being able to treat the trigger of liver failure can make an important difference. The care team will talk to you about what is happening, what they can do, and the outlook.

How is acute on chronic liver failure treated?

The doctors and nurses will do everything they can. In some cases there is no treatment that will help. So the focus will be on making the person comfortable.

When treatment is an option, it will be tailored to the person. They will usually be treated in intensive or critical care. Treatment aims to:

- Support any organs that have failed and help them to start working again.
- Track blood pressure to keep it in the normal range. This might mean having a fluid drip or medicines.
- Make sure the person is getting enough oxygen. This might mean putting them on a ventilator.
- Treat any other effects of liver failure such as HE (hepatic encephalopathy).
- Treat what has caused the liver failure, if that is possible. For example, giving antiviral medicine for hepatitis B.



Liver UK is the new name
for the British Liver Trust
and Children's Liver
Disease Foundation

www.liveruk.org
email: info@liveruk.org

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Liver transplant

In some cases a liver transplant is the best treatment option. A transplant isn't always possible. This is because people with liver failure might be too ill to survive such a big operation. Or they may die before a liver becomes available.

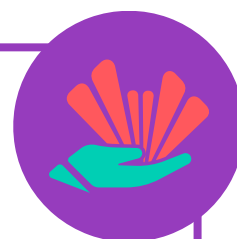
For the best chance of having a transplant, it's important that the case is referred to a transplant centre as soon as possible. Ask if a transplant could be an option.

You can read about liver transplants on our website: liveruk.org/transplant

How we can help

The Liver UK support team are here for you and for your family and friends. Find out more more at liveruk.org/support

Call our nurse-led helpline to talk to one of our team: **0800 652 7330**



More information about cirrhosis and liver disease

Acute on chronic liver failure happens in people with long term liver disease. This is called cirrhosis (say **si-row-sis**).

Cirrhosis is when the liver has got lots of scars that stop it working properly. It has lots of causes. People can live with cirrhosis for years and may not have any symptoms.

The doctors and nurses can help you understand what's happening. To help you take things in you could ask them to write down information or record it on a smartphone.

We have lots of information about liver disease and cirrhosis. To find out more, scan the QR code or visit liveruk.org/cirrhosis.



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