



About Us

The Liver Care Clinic (LCC) at the Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria, B.C. is an outpatient clinic that aims to enhance the health and quality of life of those living with decompensated liver disease. The LCC team includes physicians, nursing staff, a social worker and a dietician. This team will work with you to meet your goals, whether that be returning to work or managing complications of your disease. The LCC will use a combination of in-person and remote visits, using virtual technology to support you at home.

Program Goals

- Empower patients living with liver disease in the Greater Victoria Region
- Support families and support networks of individuals living with liver disease
- Improve patient care
- Reduce emergency room visits and hospitalization
- Use technology to increase access to care

What is Liver Disease?

The liver has several important functions, such as processing and distributing nutrients, producing bile (a substance needed to help digest food), and ridding the body of harmful substances. When your liver is not working well enough to perform these tasks, liver failure occurs.

In many cases, chronic liver failure results from cirrhosis. **Cirrhosis** is the scarring of the liver from repeated or long-lasting injury which can due to many factors such as infections, autoimmune conditions or exposure to alcohol. As scar tissue replaces healthy liver tissue the liver loses its ability to function.

Decompensated Liver Disease

When liver disease or cirrhosis is asymptomatic (i.e., you do not experience symptoms), we call it **compensated**. When it is symptomatic (i.e., you experience symptoms), we call it **decompensated**. When you develop symptoms of liver disease, it demonstrates an advanced stage of liver disease.

Symptoms

When you develop symptoms of liver disease, it can impact various areas of your life, including financial, emotional, and mental health. Patients often experience fatigue, sleep disruption, mood and/ or cognitive changes, and pain and discomfort.

Other Complications

- A buildup of fluid in your belly is called **Ascites**. Ascites is usually accompanied by a feeling of fullness and a ballooning belly. Other symptoms often include feeling short of breath, a loss of appetite, and indigestion. **We ask that you monitor for increases in your weight, leg swelling, and abdominal width.**
- An injured liver struggles to filter toxins (substances created from the breakdown of food) from the bloodstream. These toxins build up in the body and travel to the brain. This can cause you to feel confused or have difficulty thinking.
- Individuals with liver disease are susceptible to muscle cramps and weakness.
- Swollen and enlarged veins are called **varices**. In some cases, the veins in your esophagus (food pipe) and stomach can swell so large that they burst. This

causes bleeding inside your esophagus (food pipe) and stomach, which is dangerous. We ask that you monitor for signs of varices, which includes vomiting blood or a black coffee ground like substance, dark/ black stools, and/ or bright red stools.

- Swelling (edema) can affect any part of the body, but you might notice it more in your hands, arms, feet, ankles and legs.
- Yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes (jaundice). This occurs when the diseased liver doesn't remove enough bilirubin, a blood waste product.
- Itchiness (pruritis). Itching is usually caused by a buildup of toxins that have not been filtered by the liver.

Resources to help you on your journey

To learn more about living with cirrhosis and self-care tips, we recommend reviewing the patient modules on CirrhosisCare.ca. These modules were developed by a team of experts and patient partners, and "provide information and video content about the most common things you'll need to know about cirrhosis..." To review these modules, click [here](#).

Liver Transplant

A liver transplant is often considered once patients become symptomatic from liver disease; however, evaluation is a complex and intensive process. Transplantation is performed in Vancouver by the BC Transplant Society. If you are eligible and your physician believes you need a transplant, our team will start the referral process.

Nutrition

People with cirrhosis are at risk of becoming malnourished. To counter this, you need to eat more protein and calories. People with liver disease burn more calories than the average person and increased nutritional intake is needed. Talk to our dietitian about getting the right amount of calories for you.

When to Eat:

You might find eating to be difficult. Fluid build-up, a lack of hunger, and nausea may impact your appetite and ability to eat. To improve your food intake, we recommend eating:

- breakfast soon after you wake up
- every 2 to 4 hours during the day
- a snack before bed, and again if you wake in the night

Salt Consumption

A low sodium diet is a very important part of managing your ascites. Too much sodium can make your body hold on to extra fluid. This fluid can pool in your belly and legs.

Swelling in your belly (ascites) can make you feel fuller, quicker. **We recommend reducing your salt intake and aiming for 1.5 – 2 grams (less than 2,000 milligrams) of sodium per day.**

Protein Consumption

People with cirrhosis need more protein to help build and maintain muscle. Talk to your team about how much is right for you. You may need to use protein supplements to help get enough protein in your day.

Vitamins

People with cirrhosis can be low in some vitamins and minerals. Getting enough vitamin D and calcium will help keep your bones strong. **We recommend supplementing with Vitamin D 1000 to 2000 units per day.** Talk to your team about whether other supplements are recommended.

For more information, checkout these handouts!

- [Eating Well with Cirrhosis](#)
- [Nutrition in Cirrhosis – A Guide for Patients](#)

Medication Safety

Most medicines are processed through the liver and kidneys. So, it's important to think about safety when you are taking medicine, especially when you have liver disease.

- Tylenol (acetaminophen) can be toxic to the liver in high amounts. However, up to 2,000 milligrams (4 extra strength tablets) per day is safe in liver disease.
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (**NSAIDs**) are medicines used to treat pain. These medications can be found over the counter. Some common brand and generic names include Naproxen, Ibuprofen, Aleve, Aspirin, and Motrin. We recommend **avoiding these medications** unless directed to take them by your doctor.
- Other medications and natural supplements can harm your liver. If you have any questions, talk to our team before taking additional medications or supplements.

Exercise

Most people with cirrhosis *can* and *should* exercise regularly. Exercising regularly improves muscle strength and can maintain or increase your current activities. If you do not exercise and move regularly, you can develop low muscle mass and be at risk for greater complications of liver disease.

For more information and some great **exercise tips** to get you started, checkout <https://cirrhosiscare.ca/healthy-living-patients/before-you-start/>

Social Worker

Social workers can support you and those close to you in dealing with the emotional and practical issues that may occur as you manage your health. We can provide support and counselling for:

- Fears and concerns related to your illness and treatment
- Depression and anxiety
- Adjustment and stress management
- Family conflict
- Grief and Loss
- Lifestyle changes
- End of life decisions
- Navigating the healthcare system

We can provide advocacy and information about resources including:

- Indigenous services
- Assistance with pre-transplant planning
- Mental health
- Substance use, harm reduction and relapse-prevention supports
- Advance care planning (representation agreements, power of attorney)
- Community-based services (shelters, food banks, health and dental clinics)
- Financial supports (income assistance, disability pensions)
- Tax tips and tax credits
- Medication coverage or supplies
- Home care assistance (e.g., caregiver support, subsidized housing, peer support)

Alcohol

The liver is responsible for many important functions, such as processing what the body needs and discarding what it doesn't. As the liver breaks down alcohol, a **toxin** is released which damages liver cells.

The most important thing you can do is ideally to **avoid alcohol use**. There are numerous treatment and medication options available to help patients reach their alcohol-related goals; our team is here to support you regardless of what those goals are. We work closely with the Umbrella Organization and have a peer support worker who is available to meet with our patients and caregivers both within and outside of the clinic.

Umbrella Society for Addictions & Mental Health

Umbrella actively promotes understanding, acceptance and support for people affected by addiction and mental health issues through peer support programs:

- System navigation to connect with clinical and community services
- General connectedness, to provide additional support outside of other services
- Supporting the family
- Problem solving supports for other life challenges

Self-referral – call the office Phone: 250-380-0595 or by send an email to:

wecanhelp@umbrellasociety.ca

901 Kings Road, Victoria www.umbrellasociety.ca