



The Liver Is Our Workhorse

Our liver takes up a large portion of our abdomen. Its heftiest bulk is on the right side but its lobes also continue across to the left side of the body. It is the largest organ in the body (excluding the skin) contributing about 2 percent to our total body weight. Here's an interesting fact: the liver has the ability to restore itself if injured. For instance, when 70 percent of the liver is removed the remaining lobes enlarge to restore the liver to its original size quite rapidly. This kind of regeneration does not occur however when the liver is severely impaired from disease.

- ◆ The liver performs many vital and complex functions including blood management, storage, secretion, and metabolic regulation. It is also very important to a well-functioning immune system. Everything we eat, breathe and absorb through our skin must be dealt with by the liver. For instance:
- ◆ 85-90% of the blood that leaves the stomach and intestines carries important nutrients to the liver where they are converted into substances the body can use.
- ◆ It stores iron, vitamins and mineral reserves.
- ◆ It stores carbohydrates, or sugars, and releases them as energy between meals or when the body's energy demands are high.
- ◆ Proteins are released to the muscles as energy, stored for later use, or converted to urea for excretion in the urine.
- ◆ It breaks down old, worn-out red blood cells and recycles their components for other uses including the creation of bile to help with fat digestion.
- ◆ It removes chemicals from our bodies including alcohol, drugs (prescription, over-the-counter, and recreational) as well as car exhaust, cleaning products, smoke; poisons we are exposed to every day.
- ◆ It makes chemicals that help our bodies clot properly when we cut ourselves.

Given the many activities performed by the liver it is in our best interest to nurture it through diet, supplementation and habits. The liver can normally take a lot of punishment before it succumbs to disease yet it rarely complains. Sadly, we often don't know problems exist until they are quite advanced so prevention and monitoring are very important.

Prevention

What can we do to support our liver and keep it functioning optimally for many years to come? According to Dr. Michael T. Murray, ND, some of the best foods we can eat to support the functions of our liver include:

- ◆ High sulfur foods like garlic, legumes, onions, and eggs
- ◆ Foods with high soluble fiber like pears, apples, oat bran and legumes
- ◆ Cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage
- ◆ Artichokes, beets, carrots and dandelion greens are very supportive
- ◆ Herbs and spices like turmeric, cinnamon and licorice
- ◆ Green foods like wheatgrass and barley grass juice, chlorella and spirulina

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Helpful herbs and supplements include a high quality multivitamin and mineral formula and herbs such as turmeric, cinnamon, licorice, milk thistle, ginseng, Schizandra berry extract, Oregon grape, burdock, and dandelion. Many natural health practitioners often recommend a liver and gallbladder cleanse at least once each year to rid the body of any bile stones and gravel that may have accumulated.

There are some things that we should not do as well. Our liver will thank us if we refrain from or at least limit the things that cause it to become overworked.

- ◆ Avoid alcoholic beverages
- ◆ Go easy on the fatty foods. They can be rough on the liver.
- ◆ Minimize the number of drugs (chemicals) taken into the body. Although sometimes necessary we must remember that medicines are chemicals and should be used with utmost consideration for effects on all parts of the body, especially the liver.
- ◆ A clean house is nice but we should be aware of the dangers associated with cleaning products. We breathe the fumes of aerosol sprays and when we get cleaning products on our skin those chemicals are absorbed into our body and must be dealt with by our liver.
- ◆ Sometimes a hug is a better choice than a kiss or other intimate contact. Hepatitis can be passed on through saliva, blood and other body fluids.

Holistic health practitioners see emotions tied to different parts of the body. Whenever there is a physical problem we know that it will not be resolved until emotional issues are addressed as well. Given this approach, anger is the emotion that is stored in the liver therefore individuals with liver issues should look at resolving pent up anger in order to heal. Likewise, in order to prevent liver issues in the future we may want to address anger issues now.

Monitoring

Regular blood testing for liver health and function is advisable along with regular checkups. It is also important to go over the results with our health practitioner. We should look beyond values that are outside of the normal range by reviewing values that are high or low but still within the “normal” range as they may be a good indicator of upcoming trouble.

As we discussed earlier our liver is a hard worker that doesn't like to complain much so the sooner we can detect a problem the better able we are to fix it and better yet, the better we nurture our liver the better it will be able to maintain optimal health for a long time to come.

BIO:

Marie Bouvier-Newman is the owner of It's My Health Wellcare Collaborative in Pascoag, RI, a center that offers health products, services, information and education.

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