

Get to the bottom of elevated liver enzymes

The liver performs various functions in the body. The liver helps break down food, cleans the blood, makes proteins, and stores energy. Each of those tasks is necessary to a long, healthy life.

Many people live their lives without ever experiencing issues with their livers. However, doctors may recommend a liver function test for patients who develops yellowing of the skin, low energy or even slurred speech, each of which may indicate liver problems. A liver function test will determine if liver enzymes are functioning properly.

Enzymes are substances that accelerates chemical reactions within the body. According to the Mayo Clinic, elevated liver enzymes can indicate inflammation or damage in liver cells. When these cells are injured or inflamed, they can leak higher levels of enzymes into the blood.

Elevated liver enzymes do not always indicate a chronic liver problem. In fact, many times elevated liver enzyme levels are a temporary byproduct of certain medications or other unique, nonpermanent situations. However, elevated enzymes also can indicate liver diseases like hepatitis. Fatty liver disease also may result in elevated liver enzymes.

WebMD says that doctors may request a series of liver function tests to check for common enzymes. Some of the more frequently checked enzymes include alanine transaminase (ALT), aspartate transaminase (AST), alkaline phosphatase (ALP), and gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase (GGT). Tests are typically recommended for patients who report symptoms like dark urine, low appetite, belly swelling, and fatigue. Tests also may be required if a person has a family history of liver disease or engages in high-risk behaviors, such as heavy alcohol consumption. People who are overweight or have diabetes also may be at risk, states the Cleveland Clinic.

Care and treatment for elevated liver enzymes involves finding the cause. If enzymes are elevated due to drug or alcohol use, stopping such behavior can help the liver recover. Doctors may prescribe losing weight or eating a healthier diet if they believe being overweight or obese or one's poor eating habits are causing elevated enzyme levels. When a cause cannot be identified, a general practitioner may refer patients to doctors who specialize in liver diseases for further testing.

Elevated liver enzymes are often indicative of an underlying problem. Finding the root cause can help people get on the road to recovery and feel better faster.

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