

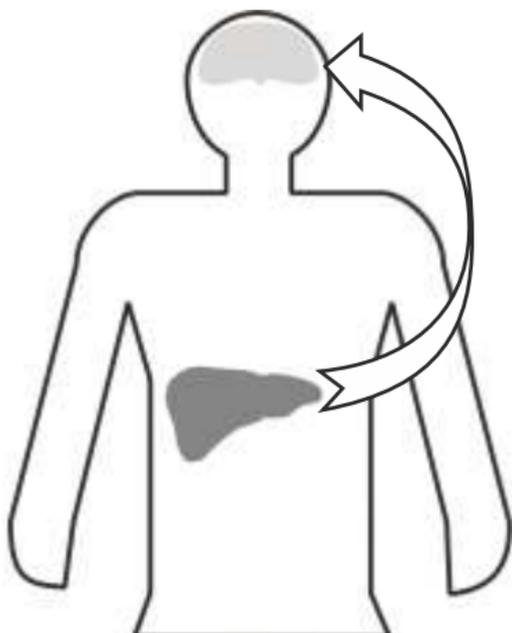


Hepatic Encephalopathy

Liver
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LIVER PATIENT SUPPORT

What is Hepatic Encephalopathy?

Hepatic encephalopathy (HE) is a rare condition that refers to a decline in brain function, which is often caused when a person's liver doesn't work very well.



The liver is a vital organ located on the right side of the abdomen. It carries out many important functions such as fighting infections and diseases, removing toxins from the body and storing nutrients.

The liver can become damaged by a number of things. These include contracting an infection that affects the liver, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, hereditary conditions, consuming alcohol and some diseases of the immune system. If the damage continues, it can result in an advanced liver disease, called cirrhosis.

Cirrhosis means that the liver can no longer do its job properly, and as a consequence, toxins such as ammonia (which is absorbed from the gut) are able to build up in the bloodstream. These toxins are then able to enter the brain, where they can cause mental and physical changes. These changes are known as hepatic encephalopathy (HE).

How do you know if you have HE?

The symptoms of HE can vary, range from mild to severe, and can occur slowly or quickly.

Symptoms can vary from person to person and can include a combination of the following mental and physical symptoms and signs.

Mental:

- Drowsiness
- Forgetting things
- Mild confusion
- Being extra nervous or excited
- Inappropriate behaviour

Physical:

- Breath with musty or sweet odour
- Slower sluggish movements
- Shaky hands or arms
- Sleep problems (awake during the night / sleep during the day)

If you have these symptoms, or someone you know is showing signs of HE, please speak to a healthcare professional urgently.

How is HE triggered?

An episode of HE may be brought on by different triggers, which are also known as 'precipitating factors'.

Examples of precipitating factors which may trigger HE include;

- Constipation
- Dehydration
- Infections
- Surgery
- Bleeding from the stomach, intestines or other areas of the digestive tract
- Some medications

How is HE Treated?

Treatment depends on how serious the symptoms are and if there are any triggers causing the episode of HE.

The two main ways that HE is treated are:

- Any triggers that may have caused the episode of HE would need to be investigated for their presence, and these triggers would then need to be treated.
- Medications may be given to treat the episode of HE. These work by helping to reduce the amount of toxins in the bloodstream, by reducing their absorption from the gut.

Medications may also be given to help prevent further episodes of HE from occurring.

While you are being treated, you may start to feel better. It is important however, that you continue to take your medications and only stop if directed by your healthcare professional.

What can I do to help myself?

- Take any medications that you are given as directed by your medical team.
- Follow any diet recommendations that you have been given.
- Check with your doctor or nurse before starting any new medications.
- Inform your doctor or nurse if you notice any changes, such as feeling drowsy or being very forgetful or having trouble thinking clearly.
- Symptoms of HE can be confused with other conditions, therefore it is essential your history of liver disease is communicated to medical teams - it is advisable to carry information that states you have HE (you could perhaps carry this leaflet with you).

As HE can affect memory, it might be helpful for you to be accompanied by a friend or relative when attending medical/hospital appointments.

Please feel free to pass this leaflet on to your GP or clinician.

Acknowledgement:

Some of the information contained in this leaflet may also appear elsewhere. We are very grateful to Dianne Backhouse RGN, Hepatology Clinical Nurse Specialist, Hull University Teaching Hospitals for writing this LIVErNORTH publication for the benefit of liver patients. (with additional PPI input from LIVErNORTH members)

LIVErNORTH can help you:

As well as having many Liver health professionals as members, we have access to extensive information on all liver diseases and treatments - our contact details on the back cover.

All of our information leaflets are freely available from the following sources:

1. ISSUU: (online publishing service)

<https://issuu.com/livernorth>

2. Download from our website:

(<http://www.livernorth.org.uk/pages/factsheet.htm>)

3. Collect from our display boards:

(Various Hospitals throughout the region)

4. Email us:

(info@livernorth.org.uk)

5. Phone/FAX:

(0191 3702961)

6. Write:

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