

Liver cancer is amongst the top 10 cancers that occur in Pakistan. The incidence of liver cancer is on the rise due to increasing hepatitis B and hepatitis C infections.

### What is liver cancer?

The liver is the largest organ in the human body. Found behind the ribs on the right side of the abdomen, the liver filters the blood coming in from the digestive tract before it flows to the rest of the body. The liver produces enzymes and bile that help digest food and help convert food into substances needed for growth. It also makes the protein necessary for blood clotting and other functions.

The liver is made up of many cell types but the majority of liver cancer originates from cells called hepatocytes, which is why liver cancer is often referred to as hepatocellular carcinoma.

### What are its symptoms?

Few symptoms are noted in the early stages of liver cancer and can be mistaken for liver cirrhosis. The most common symptoms of liver cancer include upper abdominal pain extending to the back and shoulder, swollen abdomen, bloating, unexplained loss of appetite or weight, weakness, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, jaundice or yellow skin and eyes, dark urine, or unexplained fever.

### What are the risk factors associated with liver cancer?

**1 Chronic liver infection** – Chronic liver

infection such as hepatitis B or C virus can lead to liver cancer over a period of time.

- 2 Cirrhosis** – Irritation and inflammation caused by alcohol abuse, chemicals, viruses and parasites can increase the risk of developing liver cancer.
- 3 Aflatoxin** – This harmful substance, made using certain types of mold, can lead to liver cancer.
- 4 Gender** – Men are twice as likely to develop this disease as women.
- 5 Age** – This cancer occurs more often in people over 60 years of age.

### What tests will I have to take to detect liver cancer?

Your doctor will go through your medical history and conduct a physical exam to check for lumps or swelling in the spleen, liver or other abdominal organs. Your doctor will order blood tests to detect high levels of alpha-fetoprotein in the blood, which signals a problem in the liver.

Your doctor may order a CT scan, ultrasound, MRI or another form of imaging studies to highlight the tumour in the liver both with and without contrast material, or x-ray dye.

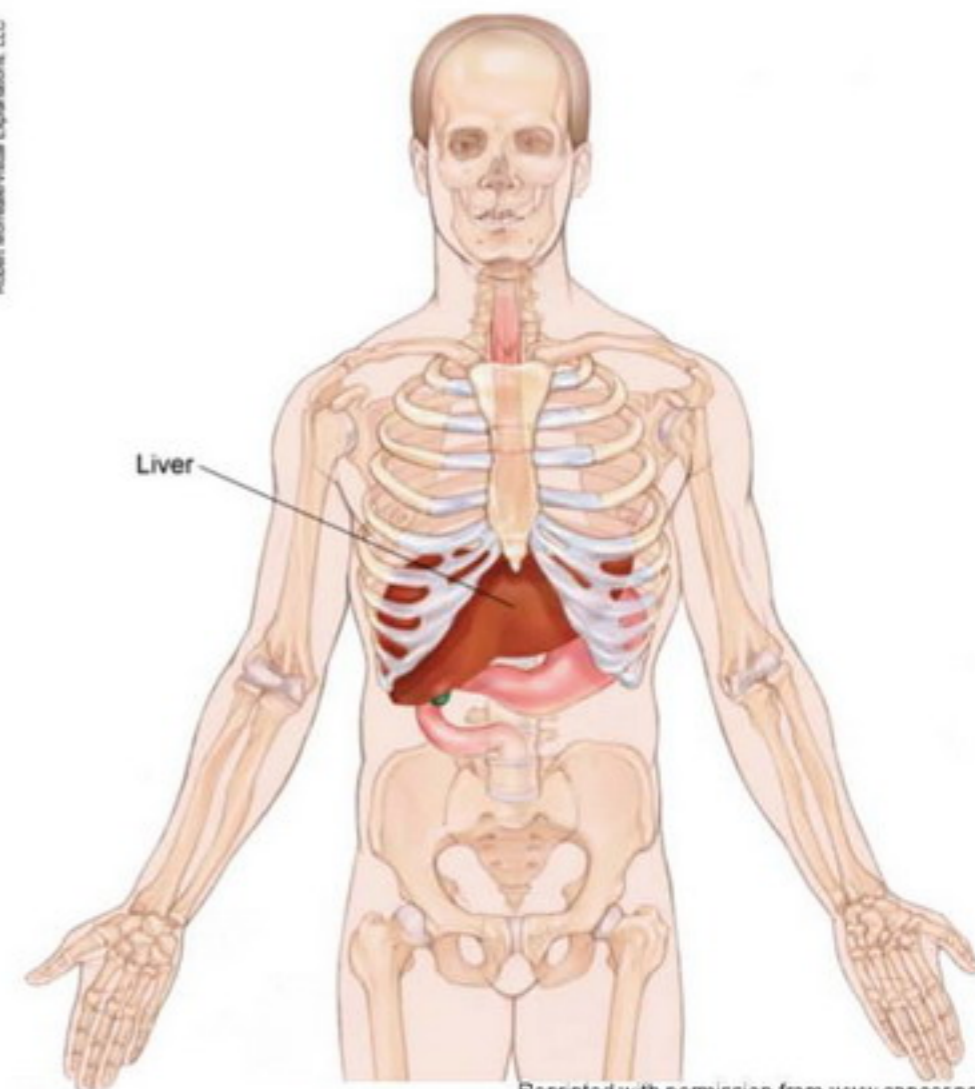
A liver biopsy, where a tissue sample will be taken from the liver for examination

under a microscope by a pathologist, may be required.

### What is the treatment for this type of cancer?

There are many types of treatment options for liver cancer:

Surgery is one option, in which part of the liver is removed. A liver transplant, replacing the liver with a healthy or part of a healthy liver from a donor, is



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another option.

Both radiation therapy, which uses high-energy radiation rays to destroy cancer cells, and chemotherapy, which uses anti-cancer drugs to eliminate cancer cells are also used to treat all stages of lung cancer.

Biological therapy is another option, where certain substances travel through the blood affecting cells all over the body. In this method, the immune system naturally fights the cancer.

### **What can I do to prevent liver cancer?**

Make sure you get yearly examination from your physician. Get vaccinated for hepatitis B. Avoid behaviours that can lead to hepatitis B or C infections. Practice safe sex. Do not share infected needles. Use clean, screened blood if needed. Do not drink alcohol. Implement a healthy diet, low in fat and processed foods. Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy weight.

Again, do not forget to talk to your physician if you are exposed to any of the risk factors associated with this type of cancer.

### **NOTES**

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## **INFORMATION ON LIVER CANCER**

