Native Communities face higher rates of liver cancer than other groups\(^1\). To combat this, there are many steps we can take to reduce our risk of liver cancer. Getting vaccinated against hepatitis B and being tested (and potentially treated) for hepatitis B and hepatitis C are great ways to protect our livers. Limiting our alcohol use, increasing our physical activity, and eating a healthy diet also help improve our liver health!

Your liver is located in the upper right portion of your abdomen (belly) and is about the size of a football. This amazing organ turns what you eat and drink into energy and nutrients for your body to use. The liver also removes harmful substances from your body. Liver cancer is the growth and spread of unhealthy cells in the liver. A group of these unhealthy cells is called a tumor\(^2\).

### Symptoms

Most people do not have signs or symptoms in the early stages of liver cancer. When symptoms appear they may include:

- Weight loss without trying and/or loss of appetite
- Discomfort in the upper abdomen on the right side
- Nausea, vomiting, and/or unusual tiredness
- A swollen abdomen
- Yellow discoloration of skin and whites of eyes (also called jaundice)
- White stools

Make an appointment with your doctor if you have any troubling signs or symptoms.

### Causes

#### Lifestyle risk factors:

- Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease or obesity
- Heavy alcohol use
- Commercial tobacco use

#### Chronic viral hepatitis:

- Hepatitis B or hepatitis C infections (usually spread through shared needles)

#### Other risk factors:

- Certain inherited liver diseases
- Diabetes
- Cirrhosis or scarring of the liver

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Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine can complement western medicine in many ways. From eating Indigenous foods to participating in traditional physical activity, our Native cultures provide many health opportunities. Discuss your liver health with your traditional medicine practitioner. There may be supportive medicines or cultural practices to help you on your holistic health journey. Your traditional medicine healer may also be able to provide guidance and support.

Reduce your risk

The best way to prevent liver cancer is to prevent cirrhosis and hepatitis B and C infections. You can reduce your risk of liver cancer through changes in lifestyle choices:

- Get screened and vaccinated for hepatitis B
- Limit alcohol use
- Quit smoking commercial tobacco
- Maintain a healthy weight

Protect yourself from hepatitis B and C by taking the following precautions:

- Not sharing needles, other injection drug equipment, or equipment used to snort or smoke drugs
- Practice safer sex, including condom use
- Only getting tattoos and body piercings from someone licensed
- Get tested for hepatitis B and C, seek medical care if you have it

Your Resources

The Native American Community Clinic can help support you in reducing your risk of liver cancer while honoring your traditions. We can offer help in:

- Adopting a healthy lifestyle and eating habits
- Quitting smoking commercial tobacco
- Harm reduction services and substance use treatment
- Hepatitis screening and treatment