



Liver Cancer

Overview

Native Communities face higher rates of liver cancer than other groups¹. 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 tumor².



Fast Facts

Liver cancer rates were between 50% to over 3 times higher for Native people compared to the white population

The rates of liver cancer are significantly higher for Native males compared with Native females

Rates of liver cancer among the 65+ age group are between 2 to 3 times higher for Indigenous males compared with the white population¹

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)

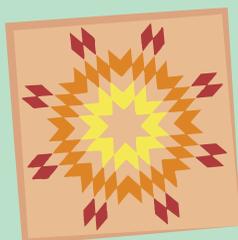
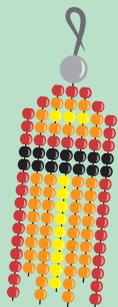
Other risk factors:

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

1. "Liver Cancer Incidence in the American Indian and Alaska Native Population, United States-- 2012-2016." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Cancer Statistics. 9 October 2019. <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/uscs/about/-data-briefs/no13-liver-cancer-incidence-AIAN-PRCDA-2012-2016.htm>.

2. "Liver Cancer." Mayo Clinic, Mayo Clinic- Patient Care & Health Information- Diseases & Conditions, 18 May 2021. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/liver-cancer/symptoms-causes/syc-20353659>.

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 support³.

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 traditions⁴. 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



americanindiancancer.org

3. Koithan, Mary and Cythia Farrell. Indigenous Native American Health Traditions. J Nurse Pract, vol 6, no. 6, 1 June 2010, pp. 477-478. National Center for Biotechnology Information. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2913884/>

4. Native American Community Clinic. Services. <https://nacc-healthcare.org/services>