

ACETAMINOPHEN (Tylenol) & ALCOHOL-INDUCED LIVER INJURIES

Do You Know the Facts? True or False:

- Each individual's liver reacts in the same way to alcohol.
- Individuals who drink "socially" or just on weekends cannot get liver disease.
- Alcohol-induced liver disease is not fatal.

Answers: All statements are false. Are you surprised by the answers? You are not alone. Most people are confused about the relationship between alcohol and their liver. Because myths are misleading, here are some factual answers to some of the questions that the Liver Transplant Program and Staff from Barnes-Jewish Hospital want you to know:

EACH INDIVIDUAL'S LIVER REACTS DIFFERENTLY TO ALCOHOL USAGE

Because every individual's liver has a different sensitivity, what one drink does to one person may not be the same for another. The reason is because all livers are genetically made up differently, just as faces and body shapes are different.

SOCIAL DRINKERS CAN DEVELOP LIVER DISEASE

Alcoholic hepatitis is a liver disease that is frequently discovered in social drinkers. You don't have to be an alcoholic to develop alcoholic hepatitis. This disease is a liver inflammation lasting one or two weeks. Some symptoms may include loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, fever, abdominal pain and tenderness. It is also found that continuous use of alcohol can lead to liver cirrhosis, which can permanently damage the liver.

LIVER DISEASE CAUSED FROM ALCOHOL CAN BE FATAL

Alcoholic cirrhosis can be fatal. The best treatment for liver disease is abstinence from alcohol. The liver acts as a filter to all of the toxins that enter the body so consuming alcohol would only enhance the disease process to the liver and other organs.

More than 25 million Americans are afflicted with liver and gall bladder diseases. Of these, more than 35,000 will die of liver disease each year. There are only a few effective treatments for most life-threatening liver diseases, mainly liver transplants.

Acetaminophen (i.e. Tylenol) can be potentially fatal if taken in doses exceeding the recommended amount. Even if acetaminophen is taken at the recommended dose, if taken in combination with alcohol, it can be fatal. Alcohol enhances the effects of acetaminophen to the liver. Many over-the-counter and prescribed medications have acetaminophen in their ingredients, such as cold remedies, Tylenol, generic acetaminophen, and pain medications. Also, check with your pharmacist to find which medications contain acetaminophen.

More than one-half of all liver diseases could be prevented if people act on the knowledge already know, estimates the Barnes-Jewish Hospital Liver Transplant Program and Staff.

* Barnes-Jewish Hospital, BJC Health System, and Washington University, School of Medicine.