



Jeb Bush  
Governor

M. Rony François, M.D., M.S.P.H., Ph.D.  
Secretary, Department of Health

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**PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*October is Liver Awareness Month*

## Your Liver Treats You Right

Your liver, the largest organ inside your body, plays a vital role in regulating life processes. This complex organ performs many functions essential to life. *You simply cannot live without it.* 25,000, 000 Americans - 1 in every 10 – are, or have been, afflicted with liver diseases. By knowing about your liver, you can help take care of this important organ in your body.

***Here are some functions your liver performs:***

- Stores iron reserves you need, as well as a lot of vitamins and other minerals.
- Makes bile to help you digest your food.
- Detoxifies poisonous chemicals, such as alcohol and drugs (over-the-counter, prescribed or illegal drugs).
- Stores energy, like a battery, by stockpiling sugar (fat carbohydrates and glucose) until you need it.
- Manufactures proteins that your body needs to stay healthy.
- Removes poisons from the air, exhaust, smoke and chemicals you breathe.
- Helps defend you against the “germ warfare” going on in your body all the time; takes cold germs, flu bugs and other germs you encounter, and weakens them.

***Here are some ways to keep your liver healthy:***

- Don't drown your liver in beer, alcohol or wine. Even one drink is too much for some people and could scar your liver for life.
- Watch the drugs. All drugs are chemicals, and when you mix them up without a doctor's advice you could create something poisonous that could damage your liver badly. Medicine is sometimes necessary. But taking pills when they aren't necessary is a bad habit.
- Be careful with aerosol sprays. Your liver has to detoxify what you breathe in. So when you use aerosol cleaners, make sure the room is ventilated, or wear a mask.
- Don't eat too many fatty foods. Your liver makes the cholesterol your body needs. Eating a well-balanced diet will help your liver properly do its job.

***Know the risks for contracting hepatitis A, B and C.***

**Hepatitis A** is spread through the fecal-oral route. Risk factors include not washing hands after using the bathroom or changing a diaper, eating uncooked food prepared by an infected person who did not wash his/her hands, drinking contaminated water, and having oral/anal sex.

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**Hepatitis B** is spread through blood and body fluids. Risk factors include having unprotected sex with an infected person, using illegal injection drugs, using the razor or toothbrush of an infected person, and exposure to infected blood or body fluids.

**Hepatitis C** is spread primarily through direct blood contact and can be transmitted through contaminated needles used in IV drug injection, as well as tattooing or body piercing. There is also a small risk of contracting hepatitis C by having unprotected sex with multiple partners.

Remember: Your liver is a non-complaining organ. Overloading it with drugs, alcohol and other junk can destroy it. Although many people with liver diseases or disorders often have no symptoms, some warning signs can include:

- Yellow discoloration of the skin or eyes;
- Abdominal swelling or severe abdominal pain;
- Prolonged itching of the skin;
- Very dark urine or pale stools; or bloody or tar-like stools;
- Chronic fatigue, nausea, loss of appetite.

If you have liver disease: Follow your doctor's advice on food, exercise and other lifestyle guidelines. Learn about liver disease and understand how your diet helps you.

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*The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of residents and visitors through public and private community efforts.*  
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