

Liver Disease and Portal Hypertension

What is portal hypertension and what causes it?

The **portal vein** is a major blood vessel that leads to the liver. **Portal hypertension** [hi-per-TEN-shun] is when the blood pressure inside the portal vein increases. Increased pressure in the portal vein can cause blood to back up. This can cause other medical problems, such as:

- **Esophageal** [ee-sof-uh-JEE-al] **varices** [VAIR-uh-sees], when the veins in the esophagus (the tube that carries food to your stomach) become enlarged.
- Ascites [ah-SITE-eez], or fluid build-up in your abdomen (belly).
- **Splenomegaly** [splen-oh-MEG-ah-lee], when your spleen becomes enlarged.
- Edema [eh-DEEM-ah], or swelling in the lower legs.
- Breast tenderness.

The main causes of portal hypertension are cirrhosis [si-ROW-sis] and blood clots.

What can I do?

To manage portal hypertension:

- 1 Follow a low-salt diet.
- 2 Take in 67 ounces or less of fluid daily.
- **3** Take blood pressure and diuretic medications exactly as ordered by your doctor.
- 4 Take and record your blood pressure daily.
- **5** Go to all tests and appointments as scheduled.

How is it diagnosed?

Depending on your symptoms, your doctor may order tests to see if you have portal hypertension.

- An endoscopy [en-DOS-kuh-pee] is a when a thin, flexible tube with a camera and a light on the end is placed in your esophagus while you are sleeping. This allows your doctor to see if you have problems with your esophageal veins.
- An angiogram [AN-jee-uh-gram] can tell your doctor if there is a blockage in the portal vein and you need a shunt (a device to help lower portal hypertension). During this test, a dye is placed in a vein. The dye makes your veins visible on a special x-ray called a fluoroscope [FLOOR-oh-scope].
- Other **imaging tests**, such as a **CT** (computed tomography) scan may also be needed.

How is it treated?

Treatment is usually focused on the cause of the complication and may include:

- Placing bands on the varices
- Taking a medication called a **beta-blocker** to lower your blood pressure
- Taking a diuretic [dy-uh-RET-ik], or "water pill," to control the edema
- Having a **paracentesis** [pair-ah-sen-TEE-sis], a procedure to drain the fluid from your abdomen
- Using a catheter to place a transhepatic [trans-heh-PAT-ik] portosystemic [POR-toh-sis-TEM-ik] shunt
- Liver transplant, if you qualify

Talk with your doctor about which treatment is best for your situation.

Go to the nearest emergency room or call 911 if you are vomiting blood.

Notes	

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