Intermountain® Healthcare

Liver Injury

Your liver has been injured — and it needs time to heal. While it's healing, you must rest and limit activity. This fact sheet explains what you should avoid, what you can do, warning signs to watch for, and how to manage pain. Following these guidelines will help protect your liver so it can heal.

Activity do's and don'ts

Recovery generally takes 3 to 6 months. Unless your doctor instructs you otherwise, during this time follow the general guidelines below.

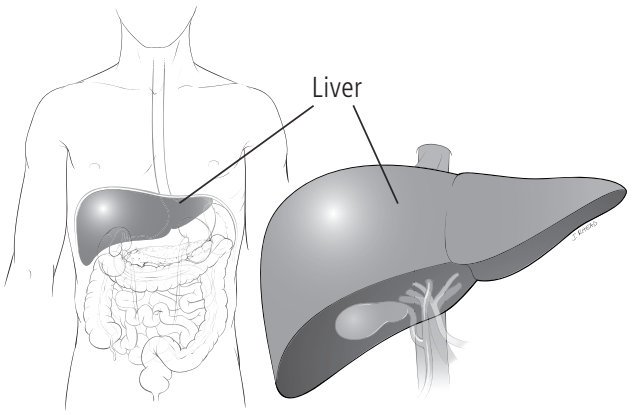
DON'T do the following activities:

- Don't lift more than 10 pounds. In other words, don't lift anything heavier than a gallon of milk.
- Don't push or pull anything heavy. For example, don't vacuum, mow, or shovel.
- Don't do any activity that could cause injury, such as contact sports or high-impact exercise. For example, avoid:
  - Football, basketball, or wrestling
  - Sports that require a helmet
  - Hiking, biking, or running
  - Aerobics, crunches, or sit-ups
  - Horseback riding or ATV riding

Ask your healthcare provider how long to avoid these activities. The amount of time varies, based on your liver injury.

DO the following activities:

- Walk, do low-impact exercise, and resume normal daily activities. (You may resume sexual activity when you feel ready.) Be careful not to overdo.
- Keep your follow-up appointment with your primary care provider or the Trauma Service.
- You can return to work when your primary healthcare provider says it's okay.



Your liver processes everything you eat and drink. It also filters harmful substances from your blood. You need to rest and avoid re-injury so your liver can heal.

Warning signs — when to get help

If you have any of the symptoms below — especially if they are getting worse — **call the Trauma Service or go to the nearest emergency department:**

- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Rapid heartbeat or trouble breathing
- Increased pain in your abdomen
- Fever of 102°F or higher
- Swelling in your abdomen, feeling overly full
- Yellowing of your eyes or skin
- Nausea or vomiting that doesn't get better
- Trouble with urinating or emptying your bowels

About pain medication

Take pain medication as you need it, but no more often than your doctor directs. Pain medication won't relieve 100% of your pain. But it will make the pain more tolerable so you can do daily activities. Your need for pain medication should decrease over time, until you don't need it at all.

See page 2 for important safety information about pain medication.

The Trauma Service and pain medication

The Trauma Service team can address only short-term pain. Because the Trauma Service does not manage chronic (long-term) pain, see the policies below:

- When you leave the hospital, you'll be prescribed enough pain medication to last until your follow-up visit, if taken as directed. During the follow-up visit, you may be given one refill prescription, if needed.
- The Trauma Service does NOT refill pain medications over the phone.
- The Trauma Service will NOT replace a prescription that's lost or stolen, or refill a prescription if you run out of medication early.

If your pain continues beyond 3 or 4 weeks, you'll need to see your primary care provider about managing pain.

Safety with opioid medication

Opioids are strong medications that change the way the brain processes pain. Examples include hydrocodone or oxycodone. Opioids can be dangerous if you don't use them correctly. Follow these rules for safety:

- **Don't drink alcohol or use recreational drugs** while taking opioid pain pills. This is especially important if you have injured your liver.
- **Don't take sleep aids, anti-anxiety medication, or other pain relievers** without your doctor's permission.
- **Don't drive a car, operate dangerous machinery, or care for others while taking the medication.** Opioid pain pills may harm your judgment.
- **Never share your pain medication.** Don't give a pill to a friend or family member, even if the person is in pain. Sharing pain medications is dangerous and illegal.
- **Lock up your pain medication** so that others cannot take it. (Some opioid medications may be a target for break-ins and theft.)
- **Take the medication only as long as you need it.** When the pain gets better, stop taking the medication. To avoid side effects from stopping suddenly, you may want to reduce the dose a little at a time for a few days.
- **Watch for side effects.**
  - The most common effect is constipation. Drink extra water and take a laxative or stool softener if needed.
  - The most serious side effect is decreased breathing, especially while you sleep. This can be deadly. If family or friends notice this problem, they should get medical help right away.
- **When you've finished taking the medication, get rid of leftover pills by dropping them off at a drug collection site.** For a list of sites, see useonlyasdirected.org/safe-disposal-drop-off-locator.

Safety with over-the-counter pain pills

- **Don't take more than the maximum daily limit of over-the-counter pain pills.** Check the bottle for the number of pills you can safely take each day.
- **Especially, don't take too much acetaminophen (Tylenol).** Don't take more than 3,000 mg total every 24 hours. Some prescribed pain pills already contain acetaminophen. Ask your pharmacist if this is the case for you.

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