

Hepatic encephalopathy

What is encephalopathy?

Encephalopathy or 'Mental Confusion' happens in patients with advanced cirrhosis when the liver is unable to filter toxins, that is ammonia out of their body. These toxins then pass through to the brain and cause confusion.

What are the signs and symptoms that you should look for?

- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Changes in mood, memory and concentration
- Trembling or 'hand flap'
- More difficulty doing your usual daily activities such as feeding, bathing, dressing

What tests are involved with encephalopathy?

- Checking for a **"liver flap"**
- **Blood test** – You may be asked to have blood tests to check your liver function and/or to measure the ammonia level.
 - **Mental Status Examination (MSE)** – the doctors and nurses may test you by asking some simple questions or ask you to do some tasks such as spelling or maths. These test your mental ability, attention and memory.



Treatment for encephalopathy:

- Your doctor will need to treat the **cause of your liver disease**.
- Your doctor will need to do tests to exclude **infections, internal bleeding** as possible causes and will ask you about your **medications** as some drugs can cause encephalopathy.
- **Lactulose or Actilax** syrup is used to remove ammonia from the body. It helps bind the toxins in your bowel and then you pass them in your bowel motions.
- **Rifaximin** is an antibiotic that is used to reduce ammonia production by bacteria in the bowel.

What can you do to prevent and manage encephalopathy?

It is important that hepatic encephalopathy is diagnosed early for a better outcome.



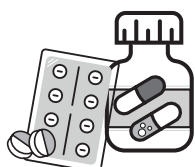
- **Seek help immediately** if your family or friends notice that you are becoming more confused, sleepy or not acting like yourself.



- **Do not drive or operate any machinery equipment.**



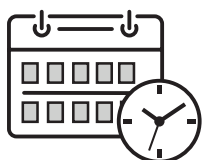
- A phone APP called '**EncephalApp: Stroop Test**' can be helpful to test your mental ability.



- Check all your **medications** with your liver specialist. Avoid sleeping tablets and strong painkillers as they can cause encephalopathy.



- **Lactulose** causes diarrhoea. You should aim to be passing 2 to 3 soft bowel motions daily. You may need to adjust the dose of lactulose based on whether you have diarrhoea or constipation. If you need help with this see your General Practitioner (GP) or call the liver clinic. Write down the number of bowel motions in a diary.



- Please **attend your clinic appointment** and **perform all tests** requested by your treating liver specialist.

References:

Handbook of Liver Disease

3rd Edition, 2012. Authors: Lawrence Friedman Emmet Keeffe

Wong, H. V. (2014). Hepatic encephalopathy in chronic liver disease: 2014 Practice Guideline by the American Association for the Study Of Liver Diseases and the European Association for the Study of the Liver. *Hepatology*, 715 - 735.

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2. **website:** doctorshealthpress.com/general-health-articles/asterixis-causes-symptoms-treatments/

3. **website:** ebay.com.au/p/P-Actilax-Lactulose-Solution-500ml/1454604030

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Partnering with Consumers - 2.9 Where information for patients carers, families and consumers about health and health services is developed internally, the organisation involves consumers in its development and review. *Standard 2, 2nd edition*

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