

Liver Cancer

What Is Liver Cancer?

Liver cancer refers to the abnormal growth of cells in the liver, which is one of the most important organs in the body. The liver processes nutrients, filters blood, and fights infections. Liver cancer can be primary, meaning it starts in the liver, or secondary (metastatic), meaning it has spread to the liver from other parts of the body. Primary liver cancer is less common in the UK, but early detection and prompt treatment are crucial to improving survival rates.

Types Of Liver Cancer

There are several types of primary liver cancer:

- **Hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC):** This is the most common form of liver cancer, accounting for about 85% of cases. It develops in the main liver cells called hepatocytes.
- **Cholangiocarcinoma** (bile duct cancer): This type affects the bile ducts inside or outside the liver and is also known as bile duct cancer.
- **Hepatoblastoma:** A rare type of liver cancer that typically affects children under the age of three.
- **Angiosarcoma:** Another rare type of cancer that starts in the blood vessels of the liver.

Causes And Risk Factors

Several factors can increase the risk of developing liver cancer:

- **Chronic liver diseases:** Long-term liver damage caused by hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or cirrhosis is a major risk factor for liver cancer.
- **Alcohol consumption:** Excessive drinking over a long period can lead to cirrhosis, which increases the risk of liver cancer.
- **Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD):** This condition, linked to obesity and type 2 diabetes, can also lead to liver damage and an increased cancer risk.
- **Exposure to toxins:** Certain chemicals like aflatoxins (a substance found in mouldy crops) and anabolic steroids are known to increase liver cancer risk.
- **Genetic conditions:** Conditions like haemochromatosis, which causes the body to absorb too much iron, can increase liver cancer risk.
- **Family history:** A family history of liver cancer can make a person more susceptible to developing the disease.

Symptoms Of Liver Cancer

In the early stages, liver cancer often does not cause symptoms, making it difficult to detect. As the cancer progresses, common symptoms may include:

- **Unexplained weight loss**
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Abdominal pain** or discomfort, particularly in the upper right side
- **Jaundice** (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- **Fatigue**
- **Swollen abdomen**
- **Nausea** and vomiting
- **Itchy skin**

If you experience any of these symptoms, it's important to seek medical attention. Early diagnosis improves the chances of successful treatment.

Diagnosis Of Liver Cancer

At **Birmingham Liver Clinic**, we use a range of diagnostic tools to detect and assess liver cancer. These include:

- **Blood tests:** These check liver function and can detect tumour markers like alpha-fetoprotein (AFP), which is often elevated in people with liver cancer.
- **Imaging tests:** Ultrasound, CT scans, and MRI scans provide detailed images of the liver to help identify any abnormalities or tumours.
- **Liver biopsy:** In some cases, a biopsy may be needed to confirm a liver cancer diagnosis. This involves taking a small sample of liver tissue for analysis.
- **Staging:** Once liver cancer is diagnosed, it's important to stage the cancer (determine its extent) to plan the most appropriate treatment. Staging is done using imaging tests and possibly additional biopsies.

Treatment Options For Liver Cancer

The treatment for liver cancer depends on factors like the size, location, and stage of the tumour, as well as the overall health of the patient. At Birmingham Liver Clinic, we offer a variety of treatments, including:

- **Surgery:**
 - **Liver resection:** Removing part of the liver that contains the tumour. This is only possible if the remaining liver is healthy enough to function.
 - **Liver transplant:** In some cases, replacing the diseased liver with a healthy donor liver may be the best option.

- **Ablation therapy:** This involves using heat (radiofrequency ablation) or cold (cryotherapy) to destroy cancer cells without removing them.
- **Embolisation therapy:** Transarterial chemoembolisation (TACE) is a procedure where chemotherapy drugs are directly delivered to the tumour through the blood vessels, combined with blocking the tumour's blood supply.
- **Chemotherapy:** Systemic chemotherapy can be used to shrink tumours and slow their growth, particularly when surgery is not an option.
- **Targeted therapy:** Certain drugs, such as sorafenib, can block specific proteins that help cancer cells grow.
- **Immunotherapy:** This type of treatment helps the body's immune system recognise and attack cancer cells.

Why Choose Birmingham Liver Clinic?

At Birmingham Liver Clinic, we provide the highest level of care for patients with liver cancer. Our experienced team of liver specialists and HPB surgeons is committed to offering personalised treatment plans using the latest advances in diagnostic and treatment technologies.

Contact Us

If you are concerned about liver cancer or have been diagnosed and want to explore your treatment options, contact Birmingham Liver Clinic today to schedule a consultation.