

[Home](#) > [Liver Tumor Center](#) > [Conditions](#) > [Cancerous Liver Tumors](#)

Liver Cancer (Hepatocellular Carcinoma)

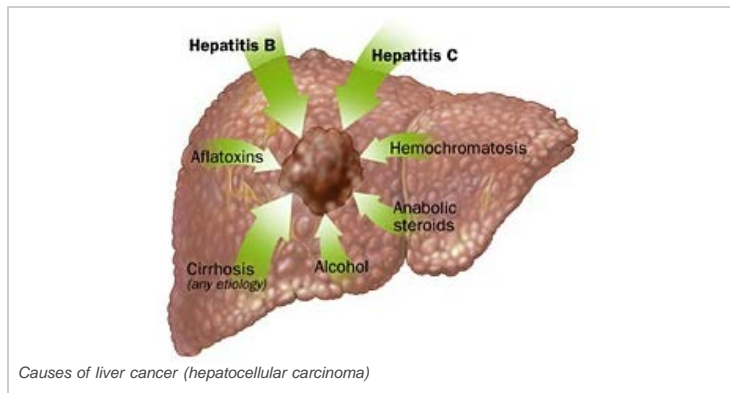
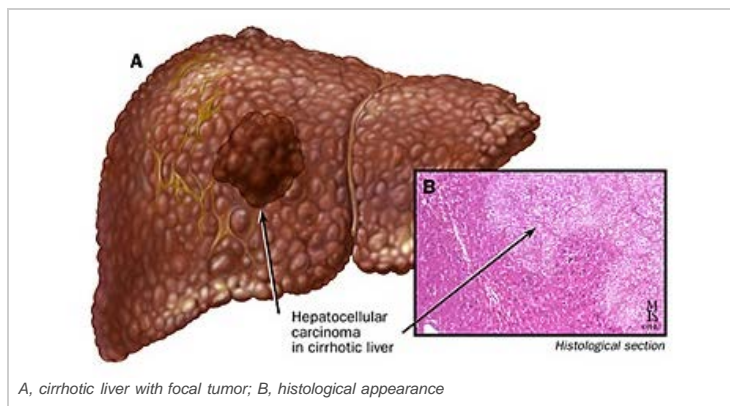
What is liver cancer?

Liver cancer is a primary cancer, meaning that it originated in the liver. (As opposed to liver metastases, or secondary liver cancers, which have spread to the liver from other organs.)

Liver cancer is responsible for more than 12,000 deaths a year in the United States and is being diagnosed more frequently. It is more common in men than women and in African Americans than whites.

It is commonly associated with cirrhosis and hepatitis. Other risk factors can include a history of alcohol use.

[Learn more about liver cancer.](#)



What are the symptoms of liver cancer?

In the United States, hepatocellular carcinoma can be found during routine screening examinations or found incidentally on exams performed for other unrelated reasons. While some patients may not have symptoms, others may experience:

- Weight loss
- Blood in the stool
- Jaundice
- Fatigue
- Fluid in abdomen

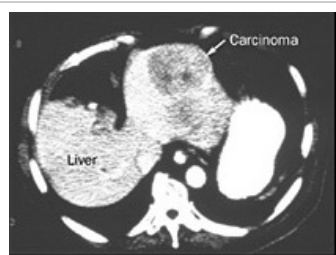
How is liver cancer diagnosed?

When you see your physician, you will have a routine examination. Your doctor will ask you questions about your general health and your family history of cancer and liver disease. You will also be asked about your lifestyle and habits, including drinking and smoking.

Your physician may order the following tests:

- **Blood work.** Blood tests may include a complete blood count, hematocrit, platelet count, liver function tests, and alpha fetoprotein, which may be elevated in patients with liver cancer.
- **Abdominal ultrasound.** This test helps the doctor see the tumor
- **CT scan.** This test identifies the tumor(s) and pinpoints their size and location in the liver, as well as their relation to the vascular / biliary structures. It also helps the doctor to determine the overall health of the liver.

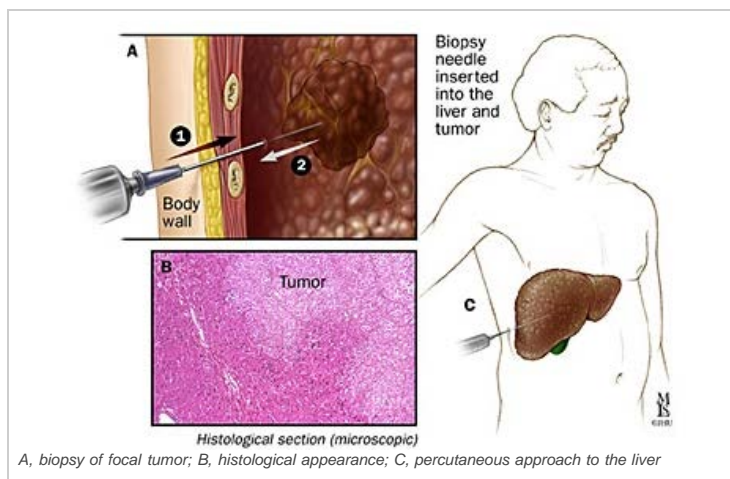
- **MRI.** This test identifies the tumor(s) and pinpoints their size and location in the liver, as well as their relation to the vascular / biliary structures. It also helps the doctor to determine the overall health of the liver. A doctor will determine whether to do a CT scan, an MRI or both.



Computed tomography (CT) scan of hepatocellular carcinoma

- **Liver biopsy.** A biopsy is the removal of a small amount of tissue for examination under a microscope. The sample removed from the biopsy is analyzed by one of our expert pathologists. Depending on the size of the tumor or mass, your physician may recommend that the biopsy be taken in one of several ways:

- By using a minimally invasive surgical technique known as laparoscopy
- By fine needle or thick needle aspiration (a core biopsy), using a computed tomography (CT or CAT) scan or ultrasound to guide the needle placement.
- Through an endoscope (a thin, lighted, flexible tube) inserted in the mouth, passed through the stomach, and into the first part of the intestine. A tool can be passed from the endoscope through the intestinal wall to remove a sample of tissue.



What is the treatment for liver cancer?

Treatment for HCC includes a combination of the following:

- [Surgery](#) to remove the tumor(s). At our center, our surgeons perform both traditional, open surgeries, as well as minimally-invasive laparoscopic surgeries.
- [Transplant](#)
- [Ablative techniques.](#) This may involve either a surgery or may be done as a procedure in radiology.
- [Intra-arterial therapies](#)
- [Chemotherapy](#)

What is the prognosis for liver cancer?

Your team of physicians will create an individualized treatment plan for you.

Video: What is Liver Cancer and How is it Treated

Dr. Michael Choti explains liver cancer and other cancers in the liver, other complicating factors and options for treatment.

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Additional Information

- [Johns Hopkins Medicine Kimmel Cancer Center](#)
- [Johns Hopkins Medicine Gastroenterology & Hepatology](#)

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