

THE DANGER OF LIVER TOXICITY

Liver toxicity is a serious condition that can affect anyone. If severe enough, this condition can lead to liver failure or even death. Although this disease state is rare, it does happen. Unfortunately, it is usually a result of an accident. The helpful information listed below can keep you and your loved ones safe from harm.

Importance of the Liver

The liver is a large organ that is located behind the lower ribs. The liver performs many functions in the body. These include filtering chemicals contained in food and alcohol and storing nutrients. The liver also produces a solution called bile. Bile is important in the digestion of fats and elimination of waste products.

Liver Toxicity

Liver toxicity is a condition that occurs when a medication or substance impairs the liver's ability to function. In turn, the liver becomes damaged. Damage from liver toxicity can cause liver failure or death.

Signs & Symptoms of Liver Toxicity

The signs and symptoms of liver toxicity are often mild. In some cases, symptoms may be nonexistent. Because of this, many victims do not realize a poisoning has occurred. General symptoms that may be experienced are listed here:

- nausea and vomiting
- excessive sweating
- lack of energy
- pale or yellow complexion

Acetaminophen (APAP) and Liver Toxicity

Who would ever think that taking a headache medication could cause liver failure? Unfortunately, APAP has become the most common cause of liver failure due to toxicity. APAP is a medication commonly used to treat headaches, ease pain, reduce fever, and improve cold symptoms. APAP is commonly found in many over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription products. These medications can be

used in children and adults. When taken correctly, this drug is safe and effective. However, exceeding the maximum daily dose can cause liver toxicity.

Guidelines for Safe Acetaminophen Use

The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that no more than 4 grams of acetaminophen should be consumed in one day. Remember, it is always important to speak with a physician regarding your personal limit for safe APAP use.

How to Prevent Acetaminophen Poisoning

Many instances of liver toxicity are accidents. Fortunately, there are safety measures that can be taken to reduce the risk of accidental poisoning.

- only take the prescribed or recommended dose of a drug
- read and follow all directions on the label when taking any medication
- do not take more than one drug containing acetaminophen at one time
- keep medications out of reach of children
- always inform your physician of any OTC or prescription drugs you are taking

Treatment for Liver Toxicity

Although certain precautions have been taken, accidental poisoning may still happen. If a poisoning has occurred, there are two options that can help.

Poison Control Center

The Poison Control Center is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The hotline can be reached at 1-800-222-1222. Make sure to have the victim's information available as well as the drugs that may have caused the poisoning.

Seeking Emergency Help

It is also important to contact emergency services or seek out an emergency room as soon as possible. There is an antidote that can be given within about the first 8 hours of APAP poisoning to prevent further damage. Other options, such as liver transplant, may also be needed depending on the extent of the toxicity.