Cirrhosis
(Scarring of the Liver)

You have been diagnosed as having Cirrhosis. Cirrhosis is a condition of scarring of the liver which is caused when the liver has tried repairing itself following damage. This damage may come from a previous infection such as one of the forms of hepatitis (usually Hepatitis C), or the damage may come from being injured by toxins. The main toxin to do this is alcohol. The scarring of the liver from use of alcohol is irreversible. That means the liver cannot return to normal even though alcohol is not used any more. The main danger of Hepatitis C infection is that it may cause *chronic* (longstanding) liver disease, and this also may lead to *cirrhosis* (scarring of the liver). This complication is progressive and irreversible.

CAUSES

Prior to available blood tests, Hepatitis C could be contracted by blood transfusions. Since testing of blood has improved, this is now unlikely. **This infection can also be contracted through intravenous drug use and the sharing of needles. It can also be contracted through physical (sexual) relationships.** The injury caused by alcohol comes from too much use. It is not a few drinks that poison the liver, but years of misuse. Usually there will be some signs and *symptoms* (problems) early with scarring of the liver that suggest the development of better habits. Alcohol should never be used while using Tylenol® (acetaminophen). A small dose of both taken together may cause irreversible damage to the liver.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

There is no specific treatment for cirrhosis; however there are things you can do to avoid making the condition worse.

- Rest as needed.
- Eat a well balanced diet. Your caregiver can help you with suggestions on this.
- Vitamin supplements including vitamins A, K, D, and thiamine can help.
- A low salt diet, water restriction, or diuretic medicine may be needed to reduce fluid retention.
- **Avoid alcohol. This can be an extremely toxic if combined with acetaminophen (Tylenol®).**
- Avoid drugs which are toxic to the liver. Some of these are: Isoniazid, Methyldopa (Aldomet) acetaminophen (Tylenol®), anabolic steroids (muscle building drugs), erythromycin, and oral contraceptives (birth control pills). Check with your caregiver to make sure medications you are presently taking will not be harmful.
- Periodic blood tests may be required. Follow your caregiver's advice regarding the timing of these.
- Milk thistle is an herbal remedy which does protect the liver against toxins; however it will not help once the liver has been scarred.

SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF:

- You have increasing fatigue or weakness.
- You develop swelling of the hands, feet, legs or face.
- You vomit bright red blood, or a coffee ground appearing material.
- You have blood in your stools, or the stools turn black and tarry.
- An oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C) develops, or as your caregiver suggests.
- You develop loss of appetite, or have *nausea* (feeling sick to your stomach) and vomiting.
- You develop jaundice.
- You develop easy bruising or bleeding.
- You have worsening of any of the problems you are concerned about.

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