

Baby Boomers

What You Need To Know

Recognizing The Signs Of Liver-Related Dementia

(NAPSA)—Forgetfulness. Confusion. Difficulty doing math. Often, these experiences are shrugged off as a normal part of getting older. However, sometimes, these changes are actually the body signaling a more significant underlying problem—liver disease.

In some cases, these symptoms can be signs of hepatic encephalopathy (HE). A serious, chronic condition, it occurs when the liver is no longer able to filter out toxins produced within the body and allows those toxins, such as ammonia, to reach the brain. Once these toxic substances are in the brain, it may cause these dementia-like symptoms.

Boomers And Liver Health

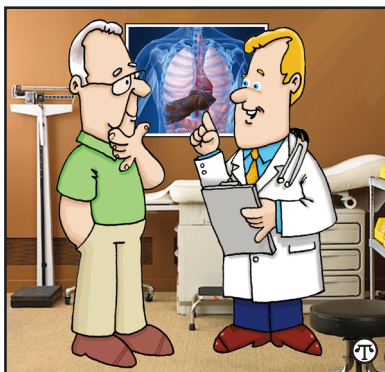
Whether you are a baby boomer or you care for a loved one within this generation, it is important to maintain liver health and understand the associated risks of liver disease. Being empowered with the awareness of specific liver conditions, such as HE, can lead to earlier discussions with your health care provider.

For starters, being a baby boomer can put you at higher risk of hepatitis C, a condition that is one of the main causes of liver damage or cirrhosis (scarring of the liver). The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force concluded that all baby boomers should get screened for hepatitis C. With rising prevalence for this age group, hepatitis C may not show symptoms until the condition has developed into a serious liver disease.

The Threat Of Hepatitis C

The rate of patients with hepatitis C is estimated to grow to approximately 5 million by 2020. Of these patients, there will be approximately 1 million diagnosed with cirrhosis. These statistics do not take into account alcoholic cirrhosis, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) or the other causes of cirrhosis.

About seven out of 10 people



Baby boomers and those who care for them need to know the importance of maintaining liver health and understand the associated risks of liver disease.

with cirrhosis will develop some form of HE. Symptoms of the condition may begin slowly and gradually get worse or they may occur suddenly and be severe from the start. Depending on how bad liver disease is in a person, the stages of HE span from mild to severe. When symptoms reach a severe level, patients' health can rapidly decline, and they can experience prolonged hospitalizations and coma. That is why knowing the signs can be critical.

Symptoms Of HE

Hepatic encephalopathy exhibits both physical and mental signs. The following are mild to moderate symptoms that you should look for if you feel that you or a loved one is affected by HE:

- Mild confusion
- Short attention span
- Mood swings
- Personality changes
- Change in sleep patterns
- Slurred speech.

If any of these symptoms is exhibited by you or someone under your care, it is important to speak with a health care provider. It is important to document the symptoms and share them with your health care provider.

To learn more about HE, visit the American Liver Foundation's dedicated webpage: www.he123.org.