

SUPPLEMENT

NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW YORK BUYERS' CLUB

Volume V, No. 17

Summer 2010

SPECIAL EDITION 50+ WAYS TO LOVE YOUR LIVER

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SOME LIVER HEALTH BASICS AND HOW THE LIVER GETS SICK

Whether you're living with HIV or with hepatitis B or C (or co-infected with hepatitis and HIV), whether you're taking liver-toxic meds, or just leading a lifestyle that stresses the liver, there are lots of reasons to be concerned about this organ (the largest within the body) and to make sure it keeps functioning properly.

The liver plays an essential role for processing food, drink, medicine—anything that goes into your stomach. (It's not just the gut that processes the stuff you ingest!) So first, be aware of what you consume, and keep in mind that good nutrition—less junk food, sodas, etc.—will reduce stress on your liver right away.

Damage to the liver can result in acute or chronic conditions. Acute conditions (like a bad reaction to a drug or the onset of hepatitis virus infection) may cause fatigue, malaise and yellowing of eyes and skin (jaundice). Chronic conditions may pass largely unnoticed, though symptoms such as fatigue, upper right quadrant pain (near the right shoulder) may arise. At later stages of chronic disease, jaundice may return.

Hepatitis means "inflammation of the liver." Infection with hepatitis B or C generally sets off an inflammation. And most people know that excessive consumption of alcohol produces liver inflammation. Unfortunately, there are also many useful medications that

have the side effect of inflaming and damaging the liver. For example, one of the most common sources of liver damage in the US is from chronic use or high doses of the very common over-the-counter drug, acetaminophen (you know the tradename: Tylenol).

The liver is the largest internal organ in the body and, among other functions, is necessary for processing foods, medicines, and pretty much anything that goes into your stomach or bloodstream.

Inflammation results in scarring of the liver. The fibers that form when the liver tries to heal (fibrosis) no longer function as liver tissue should. When enough of the liver is destroyed, the fibrotic scars start to connect, creating bridges that develop into the condition known as cirrhosis—a typical result of long term and excessive use of alcohol. This can be life threatening, and also increases the risk of liver cancer.

The effect of liver damage spreads

through the body. Other organs, such as the digestive helper, the gall bladder, may stop working. Fluid may build up in the abdomen. Blood vessels may burst in the lower part of the esophagus. This last condition arises once cirrhosis has developed and pres-

ids daily, and proper rest and exercise.

Depending on your situation (for example, co-infected with Hepatitis C and HIV), your best treatment for liver disease may be the standard therapy of pegylated alpha interferon and the nucleoside analog drug, ribavirin. This drug combination may eliminate the virus altogether. Even if the virus is not eliminated, some reduction in fibrosis may occur—and any reduction in fibrosis is certainly good. The downside: this combination drug therapy is costly, very toxic, and may have both long-term and short-term side effects.

That brings us to the nutrients and botanicals that have been studied and used for liver health. While only you and your health care provider(s) can decide what's best for you, the scientific evidence and the record of traditional use regarding these nutrients and botanicals, we believe, offers an important complementary/alternative source of treatment information for anyone dealing with liver disease.

This guide to liver health prepared by NYBC Treatment Director George M. Carter, who, as a longtime hepatitis C survivor, offers his own personal perspectives, as well as insights culled from his years of work studying chronic conditions and alternative and complementary therapies for them. Other staff members and volunteers contributed to revising and editing the guide.

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NUTRIENTS AND WESTERN HERBS TO SUPPORT LIVER HEALTH

KEEPING A HEALTHY LIVER PARAMOUNT IN TREATING CHRONIC CONDITIONS

For various liver conditions, studies of individual nutrients, such as NAC (N-acetylcysteine), alpha lipoic acid, Vitamin E, and the botanical silymarin, have provided some evidence of benefit. Essentially, these offer an antioxidant approach to managing the liver disease, meaning that they appear to work by counteracting damaging inflammation. Their benefit is mainly in reducing elevated liver enzymes and/or improving symptoms. For the most part, these nutrients have a limited effect on reducing viral load.

Perhaps it's not surprising that combination therapies often work best for complicated conditions like liver disease. (Think of how drug cocktails are used to attack HIV or cancer.) However, to date, unfortunately, there have still only been a few clinical investigations of combinations of nutrients for liver conditions. A 2005 study involving 50 patients with chronic hepatitis C infection in the *Journal of Clinical Gastroenter-*

ology did give some indication that a cocktail of antioxidants (including alpha lipoic acid, Vitamin E, and silymarin) could help to normalize liver enzymes and, in a minority of cases, reduce viral load. The study authors also suggested that combining the standard antiviral therapy and an antioxidant nutrient therapy might be a way to "enhance the overall response rate" of chronic Hep C patients.

Here is our short list of nutrients and botanicals most frequently studied for liver support by modern nutritional science or by Western herbalism:

NAC (N-acetylcysteine) The established antidote for acetaminophen overdose, a leading cause of liver damage in the United States.

Alpha Lipoic Acid An antioxidant studied for liver health; some data show benefit in reducing fatty liver and inflammation in liver cells

Milk Thistle (or Artichoke; both contain *silymarin*) Milk thistle is a botanical with a long history of traditional use for liver health; also the subject of numerous modern scientific studies that generally find it has some benefit

Liver PF A proprietary blend of nutrients and herbs, including NAC, Alpha lipoic acid, milk thistle, and artichoke. A good option for those with chronic liver infections, like hepatitis B or hepatitis C.

Lecithin This may be an excellent product for people with hepatitis B or C, according to one well-designed study using three grams per day.

SAM-e (S-adenosylmethionine) This is a naturally-occurring substance in the body, and has been used as a supplement since the 1950s. SAM-e has been studied for liver health, arthritis, and depression.

Quercetin/Bromelain: Some data suggest Quercetin may have impact on Hepatitis C infection; Bromelain, an enzyme, is added to enhance absorption. *Author's note: I am currently trying this combination personally to see if it works for me—check NYBC's Blog for updates.*

For those with a chronic liver condition, a basic nutrient regimen would be NAC plus alpha lipoic acid (available from NYBC in the combination form, **Thiol-NAC**), together with milk thistle.

For those with HIV concerned about keeping the liver healthy while on antiretroviral meds, the good news is that standard doses of milk thistle are unlikely to interfere with blood levels of those HIV meds. NAC and alpha lipoic acid are also reasonable options, since they address liver inflammation, while showing some potential benefit for HIV disease as well.

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NAC N-Acetyl-Cysteine (Montiff) Each bottle, 90 capsules. \$11.25/bottle. Each tablet contains 500 mg of USP-grade NAC. USP = United States Pharmacopoeia - denoting is a standardized, pharmaceutical grade product.

Alpha Lipoic Acid (Montiff) Each bottle 60 capsules; \$15. Each capsule, 300 mg of high-grade alpha lipoic acid, a potent antioxidant and liver-protective agent.

Milk Thistle/Silymarin 80% (Jarrow) Each bottle, 200 capsules; \$12. Each capsule contains 150 mg of Milk Thistle standardized for 120 mg of Silymarin. A potent liver-strengthening herb, it stimulates the liver to regenerate itself by producing new liver cells as well as having strong antioxidant action to help prevent lipid-peroxidation of cell membranes.



Milk Thistle/ Silybin Advanced (Enzymatic Therapy) Each bottle 60 capsules. Each capsule contains 120 mg of milk thistle standardized for 120 mg of Silybin. This supplement uses a proprietary process for improved absorption.

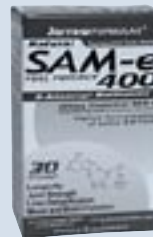
Liver PF/ToxGuard (Jarrow) Each bottle, 90 tablets; \$17.25. Each tablet contains a blend of B vitamins (no niacin), herbs such as artichoke, NAC, alpha lipoic acid, PicroMax and Uridine-5'-monophosphate, collectively designed to enhance excellent liver function and for detoxification.

Lecithin (Douglas Labs) Each bottle, 100 softgels; \$9.45. Each softgel, 1200 mg lecithin derived from soya. In rare cases, some people may develop a fish odor syndrome (usually only seen in those taking



very high doses over a few weeks). If it does, discontinue use immediately. Also, if you have a pre-existing problem with depression, very high doses may initiate or increase your depression.

SAMe (Jarrow) Each box, either 30 tablets; \$28.25. Each enterically-coated tablet, 400 mg. derived from 800 mg tosylate disulfate. SAMe is a compound of the amino acid *methionine* plus the cell's energy molecule, adenosine triphosphate (ATP). ATP is utilized in a wide range of reactions as a critical provider of the energy that drives many reactions. SAMe may be extremely helpful for liver function, while avoiding the iron-sequestering (and thus, damaging) effects of the free-form methionine.



Quercetin 500 (Jarrow) Each bottle, 200 caps; \$18. Each capsule contains 500 mg of quercetin, an antioxidant, a particular kind which is known as a *flavonol*. It is part of the *rutin* molecule and one of its biological activities is to inhibit the oxidation of the LDL (so-called "bad") cholesterol.



Warning: Quercetin may interact with certain medications such as cyclosporine, estradiol, and felodipine.

Bromelain (Jarrow) Each bottle, 60 tablets; \$9. Each tablet contains 500 mg Bromelain, which helps to digest protein (not fats or sugars) and is thus known as a *proteolytic enzyme*.

Note: These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.

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LOOKING EAST FOR ANSWERS: CHINESE HERBAL COMBINATIONS

TRADITIONAL FORMULAS PROVIDE USEFUL ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES

An ancient but always evolving medicinal tradition, Chinese herbalism has much to offer for liver health. Currently, NYBC carries Chinese herbal formulas from three US-based companies, all excellent in terms of quality and responsiveness to community needs. These are: Pacific Biologics, Health Concerns, and Zhang Herbal Extract.

A Chinese herbal formula generally seeks to address a variety of symptoms, and balances the strengths and weaknesses of individual herbs by assembling them into a combination. Many of these herbal combinations have been evaluated over centuries of use, so the support for their use is largely empirical, with some evidence from clinical studies available more recently.

The ideal way to use such traditional herbal combinations is to consult a trusted practitioner of Chinese or Indian (Ayurvedic, Siddha) medicine. (Question them closely to see if they understand your disease from a western perspective as well as their own; most likely, they will.) These practitioners will prescribe based on your signs and symptoms. It would

also be ideal to get the herbs fresh and prepare a tea with them.

This is the ideal, but we understand that many do not have a reliable practitioner nearby, cannot afford to acquire fresh herbs, or don't have time to prepare herbal teas or tinctures. The second option, then, is to consider some of the following commercial formulas:

**Hepato-Detox
Hepato-C
(Pacific Biologics)**

**Clear Heat
Ecliptex**

**Hepatoplex I & II
(Health Concerns)**

**Hepa Formula No. 1A
Hepa Formula No. 2
Circulation P
GL - Glycyrrhizin extract
(Zhang)**

For general liver health or occasional acute liver challenges, a round of the Hepato-Detox, Clear Heat, and/or Ecliptex, along with milk thistle, may help maintain good liver function. These can be used for a few

weeks, to help offset the acute effects of a medication or alcohol toxicity.

The other herbal formulas on the list are designed for managing chronic infection, with the fibrosis that generally follows. Note: most of these formulas will help improve liver function, but they do not generally have a dramatic effect on viral load.

For those with chronic hepatitis C (HCV), there are several options, depending on the stage of the disease. Chronic HCV disease can cause a variety of problems, including autoimmune disease, circulation problems, enlarged liver or spleen, as well as symptoms like debilitating fatigue or pain in the upper right part of the torso (shoulder, back).

For people who have early stage disease (as defined by a biopsy), several formulas may be helpful, including Hepato-C, Hepatoplex I, or Hepa Formula No. 1A or Hepa Formula No. 2.

First, Pacific Biologics has an excellent formula for chronic infection: Hepato-C. This formula was specifically designed to help manage hepatitis C infection.

Author's note: Hepato-C has been the centerpiece of my protocol to manage hepatitis C infection—it is the one that works the best for me. — but please don't take this as a general endorsement: as stated above, individual differences dictate that only you and an informed healthcare provider can work out what's best for you.

Also formulated with hepatitis C in mind, Hepatoplex I from Health Concerns includes herbs that address jaundice and bile secretion, help repair liver damage, and modify the immune system response.

With more advanced disease (going into cirrhosis), consider Hepatoplex II. This formula is designed to vitalize blood and is generally used

WARNING!

People with cirrhosis of the liver should be extremely cautious in using these botanicals, especially if they have autoimmune disease, HIV, or are elderly (50-60 or over). Also, these formulas probably should not be used during interferon therapy, due to potential interactions. This may be due to herbs such as scute (*Scutellaria baicalensis*, Baikal skullcap, or huang qin), Pinellia, or Bupleurum. In particular, avoid the following combination of supplements if you have cirrhosis or are on interferon therapy: Clear Heat and Ecliptex.

If you notice any trouble breathing, fever, or coughing while taking any of these herbs, stop them immediately and see your physician at once.

in conjunction with other formulas. In part, it works by improving microcirculation, which in turn may reduce liver and spleen size (if enlarged), as well as improve fibrosis scores.

You can also start a regimen based on these Zhang formulas: Hepa Formula No. 1A and Hepa Formula No. 2. Schisandra is a key herb in both Hepa Formulas and is thought to reduce liver inflammation (as assessed by the ALT level in your bloodwork). Other herb formulas may be added. For example, Circulation P is added to help improve microcirculation of blood vessels. (This may also help with spider veins that appear on the skin.)

A major goal of the Zhang formulas (like the other formulas described above) is to reduce fibrosis. Dr. Zhang also suggests Cordyceps for fatigue, Red Peony capsule to reduce portal vein pressure and Capillaris to address bile retention and jaundice. In addition, the Zhang clinic uses AI#3 and Circulation P to address symptoms arising from autoimmune disease, including vasculitis, joint pain, psoriasis and skin rashes.

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Clear Heat (Health Concerns) 336 tablets; \$42. Daily dose: 6-8 tablets. Each 750mg tablet contains Isatis extract, Oldenlandia, Lonicera, Prunella, Andrographis, Laminaria, Viola, Cordyceps and licorice — a blend designed for maintaining liver health.



Hepato-Detox (Pacific Biologic) Each bottle, 100 capsules; \$27. Each capsule, 500mg of an herbal formula designed to strengthen liver function. Combination includes salvia, codonopsis, lycium, polygonatum rhizome, astragalus, reishi, privet fruit (ligustrum), ginseng root (red ji lin), and Cornelian Asiatic cherry.



Hepato-C (Pacific Biologic) Each bottle, 120 capsules; \$31. Each capsule, 650 mg made up of a Chinese Herbal Formula for hepatitis C.

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NOTE: Prices on Health Concerns products are considerably less expensive for NYBC members!

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GOOD QUESTION: HOW DO I KNOW IF NUTRIENTS AND/OR BOTANICALS ARE WORKING FOR ME?

Ideally you should start a new agent (or agents) after being on a stable regimen (medications and supplements) for at least a month. Then, start the new agent(s) following your blood work. Then, as you get blood work done again in later months, you can look for, and assess with your doctor, any changes that may be due to the new agent(s).

Sometimes people can have Hep C or another chronic condition, yet have normal liver enzymes and no symptoms. Should they use these agents? Probably not. However, if you are co-infected with HIV, the basic antioxidant therapies described above (alpha lipoic acid, NAC, etc.) may still make sense for you. By contrast, you probably wouldn't start the Chinese herbal therapies, especially

if you have no other symptoms (like fatigue).

If you do have abnormalities in your blood work or other symptoms, however, it's worth the trouble to consider the nutrients and botanicals we've

Crafting the regimen that works best for you takes time—and it will change over time

discussed here. There are a variety of blood tests on a liver panel that can give guidance as to how the liver is functioning. These include ALT, AST, GGT, alkaline phosphatase, alpha fetoprotein (AFP), and bilirubin, to name the most commonly assessed. In addition, viral load tests can assess the amount of Hepatitis C virus in the blood (or hepatitis B).

Your doctor probably orders a liver panel for you routinely. Ask for a copy and ask to discuss it. An excellent review of the tests and their meaning can be found in *Hepatitis C Choices*, 4th edition, available online:

<http://www.hepcchallenge.org/choices/chapters.htm>

You can also assess clinical symptoms like fatigue or pain. This can be tricky, but you can start by making a 1-10 scale, with 1 = full energy, all the way up to 10 = profound, can't-get-out-of-bed fatigue. Then keep a log and just mark the day overall. After a while, patterns

may appear. A log can also help for assessing depression, "brain fog," or other symptoms that may arise, particularly in the context of HCV infection. Such logs, in turn, can be useful in seeing where you stand with your condition and with your treatment.

As you can see, there is an embarrassment of riches for managing and sustaining liver health. But you do need to stay informed. Crafting the regimen that works best for you takes time—and it will change over time. If you can, work with your health care providers to help maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of these interventions. And let's press for more clinical trials of these alternative/complementary approaches as well as more insurance coverage to ensure access to all who can benefit from them.

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Hepatoplex One (Health Concerns) Also known as Schizandra and Gardenia. Each bottle, 270 tablets; \$34.50. Each tablet, 750 mg of a proprietary blend of Chinese herbs. This blend is designed for people with earlier stage liver disease with little fibrosis present. From the Chinese medicine perspective, it is designed to regulate the *qi*, invigorate the blood, tonify the *qi*, kidney, and spleen, and clear "damp heat". Suggested use is three tablets taken three times per day between meals.

Hepatoplex Two (Health Concerns) Also known as Capillaris and Carthamus. Each bottle, 270 tablets; \$34.50. This blend is designed for people with chronic hepatitis infection with cirrhosis and fibrosis to help improve microcirculation in the capillaries.

Hepa F. No.1A Capsules (Zhang) Each bottle, 90 capsules; \$27. Contains a proprietary blend of baikal skullcap root, milk thistle seed, Schisandra fruit, capillary artemesia (entire plant), and san-qi ginseng root (Panax pseudoginseng).

Hepa F. No.2 Capsules (Zhang) Each bottle, 180 capsules; \$48. A proprietary blend of Schisandra fruit, capillary artemesia (entire plant), alisma root, polyporus (entire plant), ginger root, cinnamon twig, bitter orange rind, Chinese licorice root (gan-cao) and atractylodes root.

Circulation P (Zhang) Each bottle, 45 capsules; \$45. Each capsule holds 500mg of a proprietary blend of Safflower flower, peach kernel, dong-quai root, cnidium root, raw rehmannia root, Paeonia lactiflora PALL root, achyranthes root, Chinese throughwax root, Chinese licorice root and balloon-flower root.

GL-2 Capsules (Zhang) Each bottle, 60 capsules; \$28.35. Each capsule contains 500mg of a proprietary blend of Chinese licorice root (gan-cao) and Paeonia lactiflora PALL. root (chi-shao). Glycyrrhizin is an extract of licorice and has been used extensively in Japan for years. It is an excellent liver tonic and is used to treat not only viral hepatitis but other liver disorders.

SUPPLEMENT YOUR KNOWLEDGE ON THE 'NET

For the latest, try **www.hivandhepatitis.com** - an online publication that aims to provide accurate, timely, and cutting-edge information about treatment for HIV/AIDS, chronic hepatitis B and hepatitis C, and co-infection with HIV/HCV and HIV/HBV.

Qingcai Zhang is a licensed acupuncturist and Chinese-trained MD who runs a popular clinic in New York City, and specializes in the treatment of chronic hepatitis: **www.sinomedresearch.org/drz.htm**

Lark Lands teaches an integrated approach to liver disease that is aimed at not only living better day to day, but also at boosting health in a way that helps prevent, to the greatest extent possible, disease progression. **www.larklands.net/liver.htm**

Caring Ambassadors publishes *Hepatitis C Choices*, now in its fourth edition. Individual chapters are available in PDF format, or you can download the complete book. **www.hepcchallenge.org/choices/chapters.htm**

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New York Buyers' Club is a non-profit organization with the goal of increasing awareness about and access to vital nutritional supplements, with a focus on the needs of those affected by HIV/AIDS, Hep C, and other conditions.

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