

A quarter of us have liver damage - and a dry January isn't enough to undo the damage, warn experts

- **28 per cent of people tested by the British Liver Trust were showing the early signs of liver damage**
- **Liver disease is now the fifth biggest killer in the UK, due to alcohol, fatty diets and sedentary lifestyles**
- **Charity is calling for early liver screening to be made available to all those at risk, in a bid to save one million lives a year**

By Anna Hodgekiss



More than one in four Britons have the early signs of liver disease, according to the British Liver Trust

A booze-free January is not enough to repair the liver and keep it healthy, leading experts have warned.

Aside from the fact that many of us simply resume old habits once the month is over, a fatty diet and sedentary lifestyle can be just as damaging, they say.

A road show carried out by The British Liver Trust charity last year found that 28 per cent of people tested were showing the early signs of liver disease.

If left undetected however, these early signs could lead to permanent liver damage. Liver disease, now the fifth biggest killer in the UK, has increased in the past year as British culture continues to embrace the daily consumption of alcohol and unhealthy food choices, combined with a sedentary lifestyle, the trust said.

With no early warning signs, and tolerance levels varying genetically, liver testing is critical to identify early signs of damage so people can make lifestyle changes to save their lives.

The charity is calling on the Government to make early liver screening available to everyone at risk in a bid to save one million lives a year.

It believes GPs should ask their patients more lifestyle questions and offer a simple liver function test, as they do for patients with suspected high blood pressure.

The charity made its plea as it launched its second Love Your Liver awareness campaign, to be led by a nationwide roadshow of 'pop-up' liver health clinics.

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The trust's chief executive, Andrew Langford, said: 'Last year the Love Your Liver Roadshow found that one in four people tested were showing the early signs of liver disease. Caught at this early stage, lifestyle changes allow the liver to repair itself.'

'Having an alcoholic drink every night, over-indulging in rich food too frequently and not making time for regular exercise are major contributing factors for liver disease.'



A key issue is that many people don't realise that regardless of alcohol intake, a lack of exercise and a fatty diet can also cause cirrhosis and liver cancer

He told The Guardian: 'In the last five years, we have seen a real decrease in the age of death from liver disease. It used to be in the 60s, now it is 58, and by 2020 we would expect it to be about 50 if it follows this trajectory. Ten years ago, it was very unusual to see a 30-year-old in a liver unit awaiting a transplant. Now it is not uncommon.'

One key problem is that many of us don't realise that regardless of alcohol intake, a lack of exercise and a fatty diet can also cause cirrhosis and liver cancer. These two factors also cause fat to build up in the liver.

Mr Langford added: 'It is a myth that cirrhosis is always caused by alcohol. As everyone is affected differently, and symptoms are almost unrecognisable until the damage is beyond repair, the Government needs to take action to help people understand the damage they are doing. It's not about a quick fix in January, to repair the liver and keep it healthy, people need to follow our three-step plan all-year round: 1) Take two to three days off alcohol every week; 2) get regular exercise; 3) cut down on sugar and fat.'

'Our Love Your Liver campaign offers free screenings to the public at a series of pop-up liver health clinics, offering free FibroScan tests which help identify the early warning signs and practical advice about how to love your liver.'

'However, we can only reach a very small group of people and we're appealing for the Government to do more.' The campaign can be followed via www.loveyourliver.org.uk, www.facebook.com/britishlivertrust and Twitter @livertrust