

Benign - Not recurrent or progressive.

Bile - A fluid that is stored in the gallbladder for release when needed. Bile is necessary for the digestion of fats — it dissolves fat into small globules (similar to the way detergent lifts oil off greasy plates). Bile also assists in the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins (i.e., vitamins A, D, E and K) and converts beta-carotene to vitamin A.

Bilirubin - A product of red blood cells.

Biopsy - The removal of a small piece of living tissue for examination under a microscope. Usually performed to establish a diagnosis.

Chemotherapy - Chemical agents that have a specific and toxic effect upon the disease-causing microorganism.

Cholesterol - A soft, waxy substance found in all parts of the body. It is made in the liver and is also found in animal and dairy products.

Chronic illness - An illness that lasts longer than six months.

Cirrhosis - Extensive scarring of the liver.

Decompensated cirrhosis - A condition in which the liver becomes so scarred that blood can no longer flow through it.

Encephalopathy - Disease of the brain. Symptoms include confusion, disorientation and insomnia, and can progress to coma.

Endemic - A disease that occurs continuously in a particular population.

Epidemiology - Investigation of the causes of, and ways to control, diseases.

Esophagus - The tube that carries food from the mouth to the stomach.

Fibrous - Composed of or containing fibers.

Fulminant - Sudden onset, most severe.

Gastroenterologist - A doctor that specializes in the function and disorders of the esophagus, stomach, pancreas, intestines and liver.

Glucose - A sugar formed during digestion.

Glycogen - A substance found in the liver and muscles that is easily converted to glucose for energy.

Hemodialysis - The process of filtering the accumulated wasted products from the blood of a person whose kidneys are not functioning properly, using a kidney machine.

Hepatitis - Inflammation of the liver. It may be caused by a variety of agents, including viral infections, bacterial invasion and physical or chemical agents. Symptoms include fever, jaundice and, usually, an enlarged liver.

Hepatitis A - Formerly called infectious hepatitis, it is caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). It is an acute infection and does not progress to chronic hepatitis or cirrhosis. Most patients recover completely within six to ten weeks. Hepatitis A is spread mainly via feces and contaminated food and water. A vaccine against the hepatitis A virus is available.

Hepatitis B - Formerly called serum hepatitis, it is caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). About 10% of cases progress to chronic infection. It is transmitted through sexual contact with an infected individual, injection drug use and other exposure to infected body fluids. A vaccine against the hepatitis B virus is available.

Hepatitis C - A form of hepatitis that was previously known as non-A, non-B hepatitis and is caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). The Centers for Disease Control estimates 26,000 new cases each year, a marked decline in new infections since the virus was identified in 1988. There is no vaccine against the hepatitis C virus.