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St. Francis REFLECTIONS® Hospice
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# Liver Failure

In liver failure, the liver loses its ability to detoxify the blood, synthesize proteins, and produce bile. Cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and hepatitis are common causes.

## Common Symptoms:

**Symptoms may differ from person to person**

- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin)
- Ascites (fluid buildup in the abdomen)
- Confusion due to hepatic encephalopathy (toxin build up in the blood)
- Bleeding issues (due to impaired clotting factor production)

## Causes:

**Potential causes:**

- Long-term alcohol abuse, viral hepatitis (B or C), non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, and certain medications or toxins.

## Hospice Considerations:

End-stage liver failure is often irreversible. Symptom management focuses on alleviating discomfort.

- **Advanced Liver Disease:** When the patient has advanced liver failure with complications such as severe ascites, hepatic encephalopathy, and bleeding disorders.
- **Symptom Management:** When managing symptoms such as jaundice, confusion, and discomfort becomes challenging.
- **End-of-Life Decisions:** When the patient and family decide to shift focus from curative treatments to comfort care.

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## Symptom Management Tips:

- **Ascites:** Drainage procedures (paracentesis) if applicable or diuretics help reduce fluid accumulation in the abdomen.
- **Encephalopathy:** Lactulose is used to decrease ammonia levels and reduce confusion.
- **Bleeding:** Managing bleeding risks requires careful monitoring for suspected blood loss (i.e. fatigue and weakness, nausea and vomiting, increased heart rate, dizziness or lightheadedness, etc).
- **Nutrition:** Low-sodium diet to manage fluid retention; high-protein intake should be limited to prevent encephalopathy.

## How to Help:

- **Patient Tips:**
  - **Rest:** Allow for plenty of rest between activities to combat fatigue, which is common in liver failure.
  - **Avoid Alcohol:** Avoid alcohol, which can worsen liver damage.
  - **Skin Care:** Moisturize skin to manage itching caused by bile buildup.
- **Caregiver Tips:**
  - **Monitor Mental State:** Watch for signs of confusion or disorientation (hepatic encephalopathy) and report them to the healthcare team.
  - **Diet Support:** Provide small, protein-rich meals as tolerated to maintain strength and manage malnutrition.
  - **Manage Medications:** Ensure that medications prescribed for managing symptoms like fluid retention or confusion are taken as directed.

St. Francis Reflections is always available to assist with any questions or concerns 24/7

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