



Anatomy 101: your liver

It's as big as a football and acts like a factory — performing hundreds of important body functions. Learn how it works, and why it deserves your attention.

What it does

Your liver has a robust resume, but its most important jobs are:

Filtering blood

To remove or convert toxins



Manufacturing proteins

To support blood clotting and stabilize body chemistry



Storing sugar, fats, proteins, vitamins and minerals

To give the body what it needs



Balancing hormones

By metabolizing them once they have done their job in the body



Producing bile

To digest and absorb fat and other components of food



How it works

Your liver works like an air traffic controller, taking in blood, filtering it and sending it to other organs. Your brain, kidney, heart, lungs, muscles and bones all depend on it.



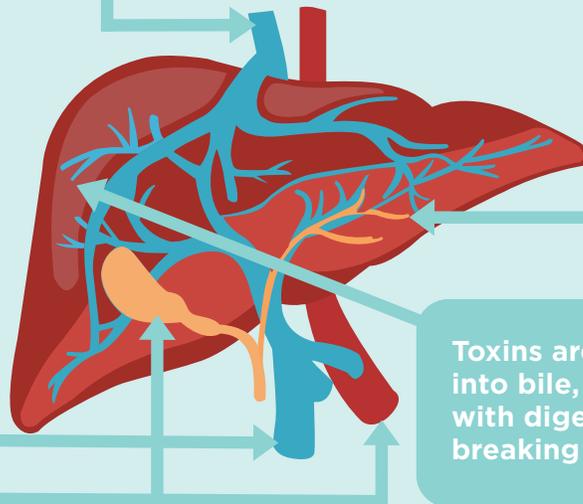
1
Blood comes in from the heart and the intestines

2
Nutrients are sorted, processed and stored

3
Needed nutrients are sent back out to the heart

4
Toxins are converted into bile, which helps with digestion by breaking down fats

5
Bile is pushed into the gallbladder, and then trickles into the intestines



Doing your part

If your liver isn't working properly, your body can't function. You could experience fatigue, nausea or jaundice. Worse, your liver could fail. Help your liver do its job by:



Limiting alcohol



Eating healthy, balanced meals



Exercising regularly



Not abusing over-the-counter drugs



Taking precautions against hepatitis



Avoiding excessive weight gain

From the expert

"Your liver is one of the hardest-working organs in your body. Without it, other organs can't function properly. Take steps to care for your liver, like exercising, eating well and being responsible when taking medications."



— Dr. Tarek Hassanein, board-certified transplant hepatologist and medical director of the Sharp HealthCare-UC San Diego joint liver transplant program

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