

GP Education

Topic: Abnormal Liver Function Tests

Interviewer: Dr Leslie Borrill, Leicester City GP and a Lead Appraiser

Interviewee: Dr Allister Grant, Consultant Hepatologist

Time: 24 minutes 35 seconds

Notes to accompany podcast:

Abnormal Liver Function Tests (ALT)

Gamma GT – can be raised for many reasons unrelated to the liver so it is advisable not to test for the enzyme unless there is a specific reason. For example, if there is a raised alkaline phosphatase and you want to know if it is liver or bony ALP. It can also be used as a tool to monitor alcoholics who are reducing their alcohol intake.

Alkaline phosphatase (ALP) can be raised due to liver or bone disorders. In adolescents it can be due to bone growth. It can also be placental or intestinal.

ALT is released from damaged hepatocytes (liver cells) so indicates hepatic inflammation.

Asymptomatic patients with raised ALP and Bilirubin i.e. painless jaundice could suggest

- Hepatobiliary malignancy
- Diseases specifically affecting the bile ducts e.g. gall stone disease, inflammatory autoimmune, liver disease
- Bad right-sided heart failure

A raised isolated ALT is common so it is advisable to repeat the test and if it is persistently elevated, investigate

History

1. Does the patient have fatty liver disease?
2. Is the patient drinking to excess?
3. What medication are they taking?
4. Do they have viral hepatitis?

After performing a Liver screen an ultrasound would be the first investigation to request to rule out chronic liver disease but a good history is important.

Hepatitis B and C

Hepatitis B and C is common in Leicester but is often undiagnosed. Patients who are at most risk include:

- South Asian and Pakistani
- Far Eastern e.g. Chinese
- North African



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- Easter European

It is recommended to screen newly registered patients as it is possible to have hepatitis B and C with normal liver function tests.

There have been advancements in the treatment of hepatitis B and C

Further Advice

- Email , phone or use Choose and Book Advice and Guidance for advice and Dr Grant will endeavour to reply within 24 hours
- Map of Medicine provides good peer reviewed advice
- Refer patients with chronically elevated enzymes

At the Clinic

- The Hepatologist will repeat the history and examination and also ask about
 - over-the-counter medication e.g. herbal medicines
 - antibiotics taken in the last 6 weeks
 - supplements and injection of growth hormones
 - family history of autoimmune disease
- A standard liver screen will be conducted
- An ultrasound will be arranged if this has not already been requested by the GP
- Tests will be carried out for fatty liver disease and to look for chronic liver disease
- A fibroelastometry scan is performed to look for scars in the liver (Fibroscan)

Patient Information Leaflets

- British Liver Trust www.britishlivertrust.org.uk
- Patient.co.uk www.patient.co.uk

