

# Hepatic Encephalopathy

## Patient Information



European Liver Patients Association

ELPA

LEVER\*  
FORENINGEN

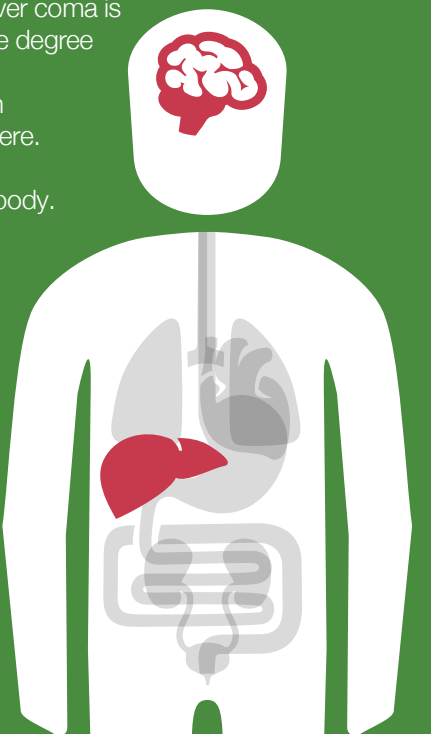


### What is Hepatic Encephalopathy?

Hepatic encephalopathy, also called hepatic encephalopathy (HE), is a brain effect that is seen in advanced liver disease. The condition is often referred to as a liver coma in daily speech, although the liver coma is actually one designation for the most severe degree of HE. HE can either long-term (chronic) or short-term (acute), and the symptoms of an HE episode may be both mild and very severe.

The liver is the largest internal organ in the body. It has hundreds of important features, including purifying the blood of toxins. Long-Permanent damage to the liver can lead to severe liver disease, also called liver cirrhosis or cirrhosis of the liver, resulting in impairment liver function.

It is estimated that around 15,000 Danes have cirrhosis and 30-40 percent will during the course of the disease develop HE. HE occurs when the liver no longer can purify the blood of toxins, which then affects the brain. This causes a number of symptoms that affect the physical and mental health of the individual.

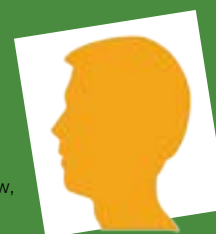


It is estimated that 3,800 Danes suffer from HE.<sup>1</sup>



### Erik's story

Patient interview, Denmark 2016



Erik had been very tired for some time, but attributed the stress of a busy working life. The fatigue was so intense that one day Erik fell asleep behind the wheel.

Only when Erik was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver did it become clear what the cause of the fatigue was. One year after Erik was diagnosed with cirrhosis, he was admitted to his first serious HE episode. Although doctors diagnosed Erik with HE, he received no preventative treatment. That meant Erik the following three years smoked in and out of the hospital due to severe HE episodes. Erik could no longer work or maintain a normal everyday life due to the constant risk of new episodes. Only when Erik came to the hospital for a new liver, did he get treatment and get better.

### What are the Symptoms of Hepatic Encephalopathy?

The people suffering from HE (liver coma) are affected in various ways. Many people experience a combination of physical and mental symptoms<sup>2,3</sup> that typically occur in episodes. The symptoms may include:

#### Mentally

- Forgetfulness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor judgment
- Apathy and irritability
- Disorientation and confusion
- Inappropriate behavior and personality change
- Hallucinations



#### Physical

- Sleep problems
- Lethargy
- Problems with speech or writing
- Poor coordination
- Bad breath
- Hands twitching
- Loss of consciousness
- Coma



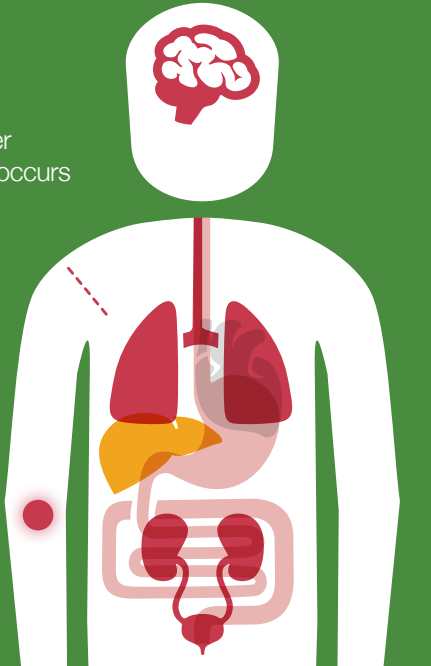
The symptoms are not always identified as HE by healthcare professionals. Therefore, it is important that you communicate with your health care provider about your condition.

The symptoms of HE can quickly change or get worse. If this happens, talk to your doctor as soon as you begin to notice changes.

## What is the reason behind the symptoms?

In some cases, HE has an identifiable trigger cause as stated below. In other cases, HE occurs without identifiable triggering cause<sup>3</sup>

- Some types of neurological drugs
- Dehydration
- Operation
- Low oxygen levels in the body
- Bleeding in the gastrointestinal tract
- Kidney problems
- Constipation
- Infection



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## Where can I Find Help and Support?

Contact the Liver Association:

[www.leverforeningen.dk](http://www.leverforeningen.dk)

formand@leverforeningen.dk  
Telephone: (+45)21 26 82 50



## How can HE be treated?

It is possible to treat HE, but treatment may vary from patient to patient. Treatment depends on the severity of the symptoms and what causes the symptoms. The patient's personal circumstances may also matter. When talking to your doctor about treatment options, provide as much relevant information as possible.

It is important to identify the triggering factor, if any, for the HE episodes. If the triggering factor is identified, it can be treated and thereby stopped or controlled. Thus, the symptoms can be limited.

There are also drugs that can prevent the HE episodes from recurring. These treatments reduce the production of toxins and their uptake into the blood. All medicines have side effects and should only be used when a doctor has prescribed them and is monitoring your treatment.

With continuous treatment, HE can be controlled and in some cases stopped. Liver cirrhosis, which is the underlying cause of HE, can only be cured by a liver transplant.

**With continuous treatment, HE can be controlled and in some cases stopped**



## There are two options for treating HE:



Treatment which limits or stops the factors that trigger the symptoms.



Treatment which reduces the production of toxins and their absorption into the blood.

## About us

This material was produced by the European Association for Liver Disease (ELPA) as part of the Time to DeLiver information campaign. The aim of the campaign is to increase awareness and change the attitude towards HE in Denmark and Europe. The Time to DeLiver: Getting a Grip on HE report can be found here:

<http://bit.ly/5wFadh>. You can read more about ELPA and the Time to DeLiver campaign at [www.elpa-info.org](http://www.elpa-info.org). You can also contact the association at: [contact@elpa-info.org](mailto:contact@elpa-info.org).



The "Time to DeLiver" campaign is sponsored by Norgine.

<sup>1</sup> Sundhedsstyrelsen, "The burden of disease" in Denmark, 2015

<sup>2</sup> ELPA, Time to DeLiver: Getting a Grip on HE, 2015, [http://www.elpa-info.org/tl\\_files/elpa\\_news/elpa/2015/ELPA-Time-to-DeLiver-Getting-a-Grip-on-HE-Report.pdf](http://www.elpa-info.org/tl_files/elpa_news/elpa/2015/ELPA-Time-to-DeLiver-Getting-a-Grip-on-HE-Report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> British Liver Trust, Hepatic Encephalopathy, 2014, <http://www.britisHLiverTrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Hepatic-Encephalopathy-HE0114.pdf>