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Britain's Best Selling – Quality Daily

Liver disease will be Britain's biggest killer 'in a generation'

Liver disease will overtake stroke and heart disease as Britain's biggest killer within a generation, ministers say, as they warn of the dangerous of obesity and drinking.

By [Rebecca Smith](#), Medical Editor

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- **Safe drink levels ignored by six in ten people**
- **Alcohol admissions top 860,000 in one year**
- **100,000 will die in next decade due to drinking**
- **School ban on fatty food to beat obesity**

Secondary schools are banned from serving chocolate, crisps and sugary drinks under a new obesity crackdown introduced today.

- **Brits drink eight drinks-a-day on holiday**
- **£3bn cost of alcohol to NHS every year**

Liver disease, which includes cirrhosis, is the only major killer disease to be rising in Britain and will overtake cardiovascular diseases as the single biggest cause of death in ten to 20 years, ministers said.

The condition is largely caused by obesity, excessive drinking and infections such as hepatitis.

Ministers will appoint a liver disease 'tsar' who will draft a strategy to combat the problem, it was announced.

Liver disease currently kills more than 7,000 people a year compared to heart disease and stroke which combined kill 86,000 people a year. But liver disease deaths have increased fivefold since the 1970s where as deaths from stroke and heart disease have dropped slightly.

The news comes after Louise Rhymes, whose daughter Stacey died last year, aged 24, from alcoholic liver disease, released photographs of her daughter to warn about the dangers of drinking. Stacey, from Nottingham drank five litres of alcohol per day.

Health Minister Ann Keen said: “Liver disease is the only one of the top five causes of death which is continuing to affect more people every year at an increasingly young age. We know that by identifying people earlier, encouraging people to change their behaviour and making sure the right services are in the right place, we can improve the quality of care and stop the rise in this disease.

Excessive drinking can lead to fatty liver, hepatitis and cirrhosis of the liver. In the early stages the damage can be stopped if the patient quits drinking but in severe cases a transplant is the only option.

Obesity can also cause fatty liver disease and it is thought one in five people in Britain have early signs of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

Damage to the liver can occur without symptoms until it reaches a severe state, however some people complain of feeling tired, have pain on the right side of the body under the ribs and warning signs include jaundice, bruising easily, vomiting blood, confusion and itching skin.

Alison Rogers, Chief Executive of the British Liver Trust said: “Front-line clinicians and the NHS as a whole need support to tackle the complex causes and over 100 different types of liver disease.

"A national strategy is exactly the right prescription to help the two million people with or at risk of liver disease. We've seen this approach work for heart disease, cancer and stroke, and now with deaths doubling in the last decade, we need to see a similar commitment to reducing liver disease."

Professor Ian Gilmore, President of the Royal College of Physicians said: “The news that there is to be a National Strategy for Liver Disease is very welcome, indeed overdue. The UK is one of the few wealthy nations where the incidence of liver disease is rising, despite being largely preventable.

"We also know what are the most effective prevention and treatment strategies when it comes to tackling alcohol misuse that, along with viral hepatitis and obesity, constitutes one of the biggest causes of liver disease. Tighter restrictions on deep discounting, widespread advertising, and greater investment in counselling and treatment could all reduce the rates of this fundamentally preventable illness."

Charles Gore, Chief Executive of The Hepatitis C Trust, said: “We are delighted that the Department of Health has acknowledged the ever growing threat of liver disease to which viral hepatitis is a major contributor.

"At last they are going to tackle it head-on with a national strategy. It is a scandal that hepatitis C is preventable and treatable yet increasing numbers of patients continue to die every year."

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