CENTER FOR DIGESTIVE HEALTH & NUTRITION
725 CHERRINGTON PARKWAY • MOON TOWNSHIP, PA 15108

Primary Biliary Cirrhosis (PBC)

Primary Biliary Cirrhosis, also known as Primary Biliary Cholangitis, is a type of liver disease that damages the bile ducts in the liver. The liver produces bile, a fluid that aids in the body's digestion of fats and elimination of waste. When the bile ducts are damaged, bile can build up in the liver, leading to inflammation, scarring, or cirrhosis.

What is the Cause of PBC?

Primary Biliary Cirrhosis's exact cause is unknown, but it is considered an autoimmune disorder. This means that the body's immune system, which usually protects against harmful substances like viruses and bacteria, mistakenly attacks the body's own tissues—in this case, the bile ducts in the liver. The disease may be linked to other autoimmune disorders such as Celiac disease, Raynaud's phenomenon, Sicca syndrome (dry eyes or mouth), and thyroid disease.

No Early Warning Symptoms

In the early stages of Primary Biliary Cirrhosis, you might not experience any symptoms. However, as the disease progresses, symptoms may develop. These can include fatigue, itchy skin, dry eyes and mouth, yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes (jaundice), darkening of the skin, and discomfort in the upper right corner of the abdomen.

Diagnostic Testing

Diagnosing Primary Biliary Cirrhosis involves a combination of medical history, physical examination, and tests. Your doctor will ask you about your and your family's health history and perform a physical exam. Blood tests are often used to diagnose the condition. These tests can check for signs of liver damage and help identify the cause of the disease. The blood tests used to diagnose Primary Biliary Cirrhosis include liver function tests, which measure levels of certain substances in your blood that can indicate liver damage. For example, high alkaline phosphatase levels, a substance often elevated in conditions that block the bile ducts, can suggest Primary Biliary Cirrhosis. Another important test is the antimitochondrial antibody (AMA) test. Most people with Primary Biliary Cirrhosis have high levels of these antibodies in their blood.

Treatment

The treatment for Primary Biliary Cirrhosis aims to slow the progression of the disease, relieve symptoms, and prevent complications. Medications can help slow the damage to your bile ducts by reducing the amount of bile in your liver. Actigall (Ursodeoxycholic acid, urodiol) is often the first medication used. If this is insufficient, other medicines, like Ocaliva (obeticholic acid), may be used. In addition to medication, lifestyle changes can also help manage the disease. These include eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, avoiding alcohol, and not smoking. If you have advanced cirrhosis, you may need a liver transplant.

In conclusion, Primary Biliary Cirrhosis is a serious but manageable condition. Understanding this disease's causes, diagnosis, and treatments is the first step toward managing it effectively. If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with Primary Biliary Cirrhosis, remember that you are not alone, and that resources and treatments are available to help you on your journey.

Center For Digestive Health & Nutrition

725 Cherrington Parkway • Moon Township, PA 15108

412.262.1000 • www.gihealth.com • IG: @thedigestivetract

The Center for Digestive Health & Nutrition is a private medical practice comprised of experienced Gastroenterologists, Nurse Practitioners, and staff members dedicated to preventing and treating digestive disorders. Our physicians have been serving the needs of those in Western Pennsylvania and surrounding areas since 1977, having cared for tens of thousands of individuals with digestive problems. Our mission is to deliver high-quality gastroenterology services efficiently and cost-consciously. We realize the very sensitive nature of GI illness and understand the necessity to provide our services in an environment that stresses patient privacy and confidentiality and where patient satisfaction is the goal. Appointments can be conveniently scheduled online via our website above. Learn more about digestive issues on Instagram @thedigestivetract