



What Is Portal Hypertension?

Portal hypertension is high blood pressure in the portal vein. The **portal vein** is a major vein located in your abdomen that takes nutrient-rich blood from the intestines and carries it to the liver. Blood pressure increases in the portal vein when there is reduced blood flow or blockages between the digestive organs and the liver.

For example, the most common cause of portal hypertension is **cirrhosis**, or “hardening” of the liver. Portal hypertension is also caused by clots in the portal vein that block blood flow to the liver.

What Are the Symptoms?

- Severe weight loss or malnutrition
- Fluid buildup in the abdomen (**ascites**)
- Enlarged liver
- Enlarged veins of the esophagus, also known as **esophageal varices**
- Yellowing of the skin (**jaundice**)

Portal hypertension is considered a rare condition. It occurs most often in older adults and may result in death, if untreated. If you experience any of the symptoms above, contact your health care provider right away.

How Is it Diagnosed?

Unfortunately, health care providers can't measure high blood pressure in the portal vein with a cuff, as they can for regular blood pressure. Health care providers may identify portal hypertension when a patient develops and reports symptoms. Your doctor may need to order a CT (computed tomography) scan, MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), or an ultrasound to look for signs of portal hypertension such as varices and enlargement of the spleen.

What Is the Treatment?

Certain medicines can help treat portal hypertension. A health care provider may

prescribe beta-blockers to decrease blood flow into your portal vein system and decrease the risk for bleeding. High blood pressure can cause esophageal varices to burst and bleed. Bleeding from varices is a serious issue leading to complications that can be fatal.

The following minimally invasive procedures are used to stop bleeding from varices:

- **Endoscopic variceal sclerotherapy (EVS)**, which is an injection that seals the bleeding
- **Endoscopic variceal banding (EVB)**, which is a band placed inside the esophagus to seal the bleeding

There are other procedures that may help. Discuss the treatment options with your health care provider to see which one is best for you.

Questions for Your Doctor

It is important to work closely with your health care provider about your diagnosis and treatment. You can bring this form with you to help talk to your medical provider about any questions and concerns you may have.

