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# Show your liver some love before it's too late to act

If your organs have taken a battering over Christmas, a scan can detect signs of disease, writes **Nina Baglin**

## ► Health

**A**RE you feeling bruised by a season of excess? Now there is a way to find out just how your liver is standing up to the strain. Too much festive cheer and celebrating at new year can leave you feeling puffy, overweight, exhausted and pale. And that's just on the outside. Inside, your organs have taken a battering too.

The Fibroscan is available at The **London Clinic** on Harley Street and is a non-invasive and painless way to test for early signs of liver disease.

Sound waves build up a picture of your liver density, revealing patches of scarring that indicate if you have damaged the organ. In cases where disease is found, the scan can avoid the need for a biopsy.

### IGNORING LIMITS

Deaths from alcoholic liver disease have doubled in the UK in the last 10 years.

We are increasingly ignoring the government "safe" limits for alcohol consumption and binge drinking to excess regularly.

In the UK there are more than 7,500 deaths from liver disease every year. Alison Rogers, chief executive of the British Liver Trust, says: "Over the last decade primary liver cancer in the UK has increased by 44 per cent. We would like to see the government's plan to tackle cancer include liver health education as a key tool in prevention."

If you are obese and drinking heavily, you are at a higher risk as sugars from alcohol are stored in your liver as fat before being processed.

The Fibroscan is available to anyone who is concerned about their liver health, not just people experiencing ill health.

"Not knowing you have damage to your liver is the worst thing that can happen to you. If you know, you can do something

about it." Dr Jalan, consultant hepatologist at The London Clinic, explains. Often it is not until you are in the most serious stage of liver disease that you will have symptoms, including jaundice, feeling sick and pain in the liver.

Your liver could be inflamed and developing hepatitis with no visible symptoms for years.

### DRINKING HEAVILY

Identifying this early with the Fibroscan gives you the opportunity to stop putting it under strain. Cirrhosis of the liver doesn't usually happen unless you've been drinking heavily for 10 or more years.

But with the trend for binge drinking continuing, regular heavy drinking is becoming the social norm. Particularly at risk are those in work environments where team bonding involves a trip to the bar to

unwind with alcohol. So how would you fare with Fibroscan? We asked two London professionals to put their lifestyles to the test...

## THE CASE STUDIES

Cameron, 30, a technical product manager, travels regularly to meet clients and negotiate sales.

"It's not uncommon for me to drink up to a bottle of whisky at a time and I use cocaine often, probably once a week.

"I also use Valium and other recreational drugs occasionally, so it's fair to say I don't look after myself as well as I could. I have been attending a lot of networking parties recently, and it's part of my working culture to participate in the drinking.

"I'm not alone in using cocaine at work;

other drugs are a way to unwind with friends." Dr Jalan reviewed the results of Cameron's blood test and Fibroscan.

"Cameron had a reading of four on the scan, which is still within normal range." The scan measures the overall density of your liver, and a reading over five signifies damage.

"But maintaining his current lifestyle puts him at significant risk or permanent damage within the next 10 years.

"He is drinking around 40 to 50 units a week, and using recreational drugs.

"A safe level of alcohol consumption would be less than half his current use."

"In the context of injury to the liver there is no protective mechanism," says Dr Jalan.

"You cannot take a medicine to prevent damage. The only thing you can do is modify your lifestyle. It is very simple, stay within the recommended limit of alcohol consumption and drink no more than four to five units a day."

### UNPREDICTABLE

Sian, 30, is a business controller. She drinks on average 20 units a week, mostly in one sitting at the weekends.

"I drank more heavily in my twenties. Now I usually drink a bottle of wine with dinner, and around three drinks out on the town once a week, with the odd glass of wine during the week. I work long hours, which can be unpredictable too."

Sian scored 3.8 on the Fibroscan, also within normal range.

"Sian may not seem to have an extravagant lifestyle, but is still probably drinking too much. A safe amount for women is 14 units, spread evenly throughout the week. She should consider cutting back to protect her liver health," says Dr Jalan.

Visit [www.thelondonclinic.co.uk](http://www.thelondonclinic.co.uk) or call 020 7935 4444. The Fibroscan costs £205 plus consulting fees. If you think your drinking is excessive call Alcoholics Anonymous on 0845 769 7555



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Too much partying  
can put your liver  
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Picture: GETTY