

# Nurse Checklist for Liver Disease and Hepatic Encephalopathy

## Patients with liver failure are at risk for hepatic encephalopathy (HE).

Once a patient has been diagnosed with having an HE episode, identify and correct precipitating factors and focus on managing the symptoms, supporting their body systems.<sup>1</sup>

- ☐ Ask patients and caregivers about previous HE episodes, including episodes of altered mental status, that may not have required hospitalization or been previously documented, such as difficulty driving, accidents, or not knowing the season, month, or day.<sup>2</sup>
- ☐ If there is a history of HE, reduce the risk of recurrence with secondary prophylaxis.<sup>2</sup>
- ☐ Patients should be encouraged to take their medicine prescribed by the doctor, understand the importance of eating a healthy diet, and monitor their bowel habits and changes in stools.<sup>3</sup>

## When transitioning a patient to a caregiver or another provider, consider these important elements of quality care<sup>1</sup>:

- ☐ Monitor the patient’s level of consciousness, blood pressure, volume status, and signs and symptoms.
- ☐ Watch for signs of infection and administer antibiotics as needed and ordered.
- ☐ Monitor glucose levels for possible hypoglycemia or hyperglycemia.
- ☐ Provide nutritional support as ordered.
- ☐ Manage ascites, which can affect multiple body systems.
- ☐ Watch for confusion, hyperthermia, respiratory and circulatory problems, and increased intracranial pressure.

## Use these 9 competencies related to liver care and a person-centered approach with your patients.

Continuous assessment of the patient’s behavior and mental status is also important due to the fluctuating nature of HE.<sup>3</sup> Here’s how people helping with the care of patients can do both.<sup>3</sup>

- ☐ Ask questions and actively listen to the patient.
- ☐ Be supportive and help the patient perform basic activities.
- ☐ Develop, implement, and evaluate a personal care plan for the patient.
- ☐ Identify signs of distress and protect the patient from stigma.
- ☐ Monitor the patient’s food and drink intake, output, and fluid and electrolyte balance.
- ☐ Provide and maintain a safe environment for effective communication.
- ☐ Frequently assess for early signs of other diseases as well as new or worsening complications of liver disease.

### References:

**1.** Lynn SJ. How to help patients with liver failure. *Am Nurse Today*. 2016;11(9):26-29. **2.** Vilstrup H, Amodio P, Bajaj J, et al. Hepatic encephalopathy in chronic liver disease: 2014 Practice Guideline by the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases and the European Association for the Study of the Liver. *Hepatology*. 2014;60(2):715-735. **3.** Royal College of Nursing. *Caring for People with Liver Disease including Liver Transplantation: a Competence Framework for Nursing*. London: Royal College of Nursing; 2019.

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