

Living with PBC glossary



Alanine aminotransferase (ALT): An enzyme found in the liver that helps convert proteins into energy for the liver cells. When the liver is damaged, ALT is released into the bloodstream and levels increase

Albumin: A protein made in the liver that enters your bloodstream and keeps fluid from leaking out of your blood vessels into other tissues; when levels drop, may suggest cirrhosis development

Alkaline phosphatase (ALP): An enzyme found in the liver and bone, which is important for breaking down proteins; elevated levels could mean liver disease

Antimitochondrial antibodies (AMAs): Antibodies are proteins that the body releases to identify and neutralize harmful molecules in the body such as bacteria and viruses; AMAs are antibodies that attack the membranes of certain cells and are seen in most, but not all, people who have primary biliary cholangitis (PBC)

Ascites: An accumulation of fluid in the abdominal area of the body that is a symptom of later-phase primary biliary cholangitis (PBC)

Aspartate aminotransferase (AST): An enzyme that helps the body break down amino acids; AST can be elevated as a result of damage to tissues of the body, including the liver. AST is also known as serum glutamic oxaloacetic transaminase

Autoimmune disease: A disorder where the body attacks its own cells as if they were a virus or bacteria

Autoimmune hepatitis: A condition in which the body's immune system attacks liver cells, leading to inflammation of the liver

Autoimmune thyroid disease (Hashimoto's disease): A disorder causing chronic inflammation of the thyroid gland, which may affect its function

Bile: A fluid made in the liver and stored in the gallbladder; when released by the liver, bile helps with digestion

Bile ducts: Tubes in the body that carry bile from the liver to the small intestine; in primary biliary cholangitis (PBC), bile ducts are damaged, which can cause bile to build up in the liver. Bile buildup can become toxic and can further damage the bile ducts

Bilirubin: A yellow bile pigment formed during the breakdown of red blood cells, it's processed by the liver and excreted in stool; when the liver is not working properly, bile can accumulate in the blood and tissues of the body and can make the skin, and sometimes the eyes, appear yellow (jaundice)

Biomarker: A biological substance which is easily measurable and can help indicate that there is an underlying medical condition

Brain fog: Difficulty in concentrating and processing information and short-term memory lapses

Celiac disease: A disorder in which individuals are not able to tolerate gluten, a protein found in wheat, leaving individuals unable to absorb nutrients

Cholangitis: Inflammation of the bile ducts

Cholestasis: Slowing down or stopping the normal flow of bile

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Chronic: Lasts a long time and does not go away

Cirrhosis: A serious condition of the liver where the organ stops working because of an accumulation of scar tissue; cirrhosis can cause chronic liver failure and may require a liver transplant

Computerized tomography (CT) scan: A noninvasive diagnostic imaging test that uses X-ray technology to produce images of the inside of the body and provide information about injury, disease, or changes to the liver, gallbladder, and biliary tract; it can also be important in identifying complications of the disease such as esophageal varices and ascites

CREST syndrome: A disorder that results in hardening of the skin and consists of calcinosis, Raynaud's disease, esophageal dysmotility, sclerodactyly, and telangiectasia syndrome

Depression: A mental state characterized by feelings of sadness, despair, and discouragement; depression can range from normal feelings of "the blues" to a serious disorder that interferes with daily life

Enzyme: A protein molecule that helps facilitate chemical reactions in the body

FibroScan®: A noninvasive ultrasound-based test used to measure liver scarring (fibrosis)

Fibrosis: The formation of excessive fibrous tissue in response to tissue damage

Fluid retention: When the body holds on to liquids that otherwise would be removed; the liquids accumulate and can cause swelling

Gamma-glutamyl transferase (GGT): This enzyme is typically the first liver enzyme to rise in the blood when bile ducts become obstructed and is used as a confirmatory test to determine if the high alkaline phosphatase (ALP) is due to liver disease

Hepatocellular carcinoma: Cancer of the liver

Inflammation: The increase of immune cells to a particular group of cells or tissues as a response to cellular injury; typically involves pain, heat, redness, and swelling

Inherited: Passed from parent to child through the genes

Jaundice: A yellow appearance of the skin and/or eyes caused by having too much bilirubin in the body

Liver biopsy: A procedure that removes a small amount of tissue from the liver; the sample can then be closely looked at to make a diagnosis, or to see how damaged the liver may be

Liver panel tests: Blood tests used to help diagnose and monitor liver disease or damage

Liver ultrasound: A noninvasive diagnostic tool that uses sound waves to create images of the liver and bile ducts

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan: A noninvasive diagnostic tool that uses magnets and radio waves to capture detailed images of the liver and biliary tract; it can also reveal the stage of liver fibrosis

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Platelets: These cells help your blood form clots (think scabs when you get a cut). Low platelet counts are common in people with cirrhosis

Portal hypertension: Abnormally high blood pressure in a major vein of the liver that is a complication of cirrhosis

Primary sclerosing cholangitis: A chronic disease that damages the bile ducts inside and outside the liver; different from primary biliary cholangitis (PBC), which affects primarily small bile ducts inside the liver

Progressive: Becoming worse over time

Proteins: Important compounds in the body that are essential components of cells and tissues

Pruritus: Itching of the skin that can affect a specific spot on the skin or can be felt all over

Rare disease: In the US, a disease is considered rare (or orphan) if it affects fewer than 200,000 people

Raynaud's disease: A disorder that causes a restriction of oxygen flow to the fingers and toes, resulting in discoloration of the skin in response to stress or cold

Rheumatoid arthritis: A disorder in which the joints are chronically inflamed

Sjögren's syndrome: A disorder in which the body's moisture-producing glands, such as the tear ducts of the eyes and saliva glands of the mouth, stop working properly over time

Symptoms: Something that you can feel or experience as a result of a disease or condition; the most common symptoms of primary biliary cholangitis (PBC) are itching (pruritus) and fatigue (tiredness), but you may also experience dry eyes and mouth, and trouble remembering and concentrating

Varices: Enlarged and abnormally windy veins