# UK liver disease deaths soar by 42% amid rising health disparities



The liver is often described as the body's mastermind, performing over 500 vital functions essential to overall health. Despite its resilience and capacity for self-repair, liver disease remains a growing health concern in the UK. Each year, more than 12,000 people die from liver-related illnesses, a toll that has climbed steadily in recent decades. This rise is attributed not only to excessive alcohol consumption but also to lifestyle factors such as diets high in saturated and trans fats and sugary foods, as well as other causes like viral hepatitis and metabolic conditions.

Editor Jo Checkley recently explored liver health by undergoing a FibroScan—a quick, non-invasive test offered at specialist clinics—to assess her liver’s condition. The scan uses sound waves to measure liver stiffness and fat content, helping to detect early signs of liver damage such as fibrosis or fatty liver disease. Checkley’s results showed her liver was healthy, comparable in flexibility to a baby’s liver, leaving her relieved and more mindful of maintaining a balanced diet, regular physical activity, and moderate alcohol consumption.

The importance of early detection is underscored by alarming statistics. Government data reveals a 42% increase in premature deaths from liver disease in the UK between 2001 and 2023, with over 10,800 such deaths recorded in 2023 alone. Deaths from alcoholic liver disease, in particular, have risen sharply, showing a nearly 60% increase since 2001. These figures are echoed by the British Liver Trust, which notes that liver disease is responsible for more than 31 deaths daily, with total annual deaths exceeding 12,000 nationwide. The Trust and government reports also highlight a troubling disparity: liver disease mortality rates are significantly higher in the most deprived areas, where social and economic factors exacerbate health outcomes.

Since the 1970s, liver disease mortality in England has surged by 400%, making the UK one of the Western European countries with the highest rates of death from liver conditions. This steep increase has prompted calls for enhanced scientific research focused on early diagnosis and treatment. FibroScan, as a painless and accurate tool, represents progress in this regard. Originally developed to assess liver stiffness by measuring the speed of shear waves travelling through liver tissue, FibroScan also evaluates fat content, aiding in the diagnosis of conditions such as alcoholic liver disease, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), chronic viral hepatitis, cirrhosis, and certain genetic disorders.

While FibroScan devices are available on the NHS when recommended by a doctor, private clinics offer the test as a quicker alternative for those seeking reassurance or proactive screening. The British Liver Trust supports community outreach through its 'Love Your Liver' roadshow, providing free FibroScan assessments and online liver health screening tools, aiming to tackle late diagnosis and raise public awareness.

Jo Checkley’s experience illustrates the value of understanding one’s liver health, particularly when symptoms like persistent fatigue or unexplained weight loss may go unnoticed or misattributed. The liver’s regenerative capacity means that damage can often be reversed or halted with appropriate lifestyle changes. This knowledge empowers individuals to take proactive steps, from dietary improvements to physical activity and moderated alcohol intake, reinforcing the liver’s central role in sustaining health.

Given the rising burden of liver disease and the disparities observed across different communities, improving awareness, early detection, and access to diagnostic tools like FibroScan are critical. These efforts form part of a broader public health strategy seeking to reverse liver disease trends and reduce the associated mortality in the UK.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.prima.co.uk/diet-and-health/healthy-living/a65861563/liver-healthy-test/), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/liver-disease-applying-all-our-health/liver-disease-applying-all-our-health), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/liver-disease-profile-december-2024-update/liver-disease-profile-december-2024-update), [[3]](https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/statistics/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.prima.co.uk/diet-and-health/healthy-living/a65861563/liver-healthy-test/), [[5]](https://hepatitisfoundation.org/general-health/what-is-fibroscan-how-does-it-help-with-fatty-liver/), [[6]](https://www.webmd.com/fatty-liver-disease/fibroscan-assessment)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/liver-disease-profile-december-2024-update/liver-disease-profile-december-2024-update), [[3]](https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/statistics/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.liver-research.org.uk/about-the-foundation/liver-disease-in-the-uk.aspx), [[5]](https://hepatitisfoundation.org/general-health/what-is-fibroscan-how-does-it-help-with-fatty-liver/), [[6]](https://www.webmd.com/fatty-liver-disease/fibroscan-assessment)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.prima.co.uk/diet-and-health/healthy-living/a65861563/liver-healthy-test/), [[3]](https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/statistics/), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/liver-disease-applying-all-our-health/liver-disease-applying-all-our-health), [[5]](https://hepatitisfoundation.org/general-health/what-is-fibroscan-how-does-it-help-with-fatty-liver/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.prima.co.uk/diet-and-health/healthy-living/a65861563/liver-healthy-test/), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/liver-disease-applying-all-our-health/liver-disease-applying-all-our-health), [[3]](https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/statistics/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.prima.co.uk/diet-and-health/healthy-living/a65861563/liver-healthy-test/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/liver-disease-profile-december-2024-update/liver-disease-profile-december-2024-update> - This UK government report provides comprehensive statistics on liver disease, highlighting a 42% increase in premature deaths from 2001 to 2023, with numbers rising from 6,140 to 10,858. It also notes a 3.6% rise in deaths from alcoholic liver disease in 2023 compared to 2022, and a significant increase of almost 60% in premature deaths from alcoholic liver disease between 2001 and 2023. The report underscores the higher rates of liver disease in the most deprived areas of England.
3. <https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/statistics/> - The British Liver Trust presents key statistics on liver disease in the UK, reporting over 11,000 deaths annually, equating to more than 31 deaths per day. The data reveals a four-fold increase in death rates over the last 50 years. In 2023, there were 9,981 deaths in England, 359 in Northern Ireland, 1,308 in Scotland, and 719 in Wales, totaling 12,367 deaths across the UK. The Trust also highlights the disproportionate impact of liver disease in the most deprived areas, where rates are approximately five times higher than in more affluent regions.
4. <https://www.liver-research.org.uk/about-the-foundation/liver-disease-in-the-uk.aspx> - The Foundation for Liver Research discusses the rising prevalence and mortality rates of liver disease in the UK, noting a 400% increase in liver disease mortality in England since 1970. The age-standardised mortality rate rose to 21.1 per 100,000 population in 2023, up from 17.8 per 100,000 in 2013. The UK now has one of the highest liver disease mortality rates in Western Europe, with over 13,000 deaths annually. The Foundation emphasizes the need for scientific research in early diagnosis and treatment to address this growing crisis.
5. <https://hepatitisfoundation.org/general-health/what-is-fibroscan-how-does-it-help-with-fatty-liver/> - The Hepatitis Foundation explains FibroScan, a non-invasive test that uses sound waves to measure liver stiffness and fat content, aiding in the assessment of liver health. The procedure involves a probe generating shear waves through the liver tissue, with the speed of these waves correlating to tissue stiffness. FibroScan provides two key measurements: Liver Stiffness Measurement (LSM) indicating liver fibrosis, and Controlled Attenuation Parameter (CAP) measuring liver fat content. It is highlighted as a painless and accurate method for detecting and staging fatty liver disease.
6. <https://www.webmd.com/fatty-liver-disease/fibroscan-assessment> - WebMD provides an overview of FibroScan, a diagnostic tool for assessing liver health. The procedure involves placing a probe on the skin over the liver, emitting waves of energy that pass through the liver. By measuring the speed of these waves, the ultrasound calculates liver stiffness, with stiffer tissue indicating more advanced liver disease. FibroScan also measures liver fat content, aiding in diagnosing and monitoring conditions like alcoholic liver disease, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), chronic hepatitis B and C, cirrhosis, and genetic diseases such as hemochromatosis and Wilson’s disease.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/liver-disease-applying-all-our-health/liver-disease-applying-all-our-health> - The UK government's 'All Our Health' publication on liver disease emphasizes the organ's vital role in the body, performing over 500 functions. It discusses the rising mortality rates from liver disease, noting a four-fold increase since 1970, with deaths now over 12,000 annually in the UK. The document highlights the primary causes of liver disease, including alcohol misuse, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), viral hepatitis, autoimmune liver disease, and metabolic liver disease. It also addresses the challenges in early detection and the need for improved public health strategies.