

## 40% of liver disease patients have been worried about their mental health during the pandemic

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A survey by the British Liver Trust in March 2021 has revealed that 40% of people with liver disease have been worried about their mental health during the pandemic.

The findings, released to coincide with Mental Health Awareness Week, showed that isolation, 'cabin fever', being unable to work, anxiety about becoming ill, and pressures of home schooling were some of the reasons liver disease patients gave for a deterioration in their mental health over the past year.

Many people with chronic liver disease are clinically extremely vulnerable to COVID-19 and have had to take extra precautions such as shielding throughout the pandemic.

678 people responded to the survey, which included questions on a wide range of issues that affect people with a liver condition in the UK. The charity plans to use the findings to inform the support it provides and its ongoing response to the pandemic. It will also use the findings in policy consultations and committee evidence to make sure those in power made the right choices for people with liver disease.

Pamela Healy OBE, Chief Executive at the British Liver Trust, says: "The pandemic has been an extremely testing time for everyone, but particularly for those people with a chronic health condition which affects the immune system, such as liver disease.

"People in the UK with liver disease often have to deal with late diagnosis, varying levels of patient care, as well as the stigma surrounding their condition. Add to this the health, social and financial effects of the pandemic and it's no surprise such a large proportion have been concerned about their mental health. We know through our nurse-led helpline that many of them have found the past 12 months incredibly difficult.

"We're also very concerned about the increase in the number of people without a pre-existing liver condition who have used alcohol or unhealthy food as a way of coping with negative feelings during the pandemic. Alcohol and obesity are both risk factors for liver disease, so we'd encourage people to find healthier ways to cope with low mood that are better for body and mind in the longer term, like going for a walk, chatting to a friend or having a relaxing bath.

"The British Liver Trust is here to help anyone affected by or at risk of liver disease, so please do contact our wonderful nurse-led helpline or join one of our online support groups if your liver health is giving you cause for concern."

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