

# Easy B Facts

## What Is ALT?

There are several kinds of blood tests that tell a doctor if your liver is damaged. One of the most common tests measures the level of **alanine aminotransferase (ALT for short)** in your blood. ALT is a chemical that liver cells release when they are damaged. High levels of ALT can be caused by many things like alcohol, drugs, toxins, and viruses such as the hepatitis B virus.

Unfortunately, ALT is not a perfect test to find out if you have liver damage. It shows only if there was liver cell damage taking place at the time of the blood test. You could have liver damage that occurred in the past, but your ALT levels could still test normal that day. That's why it is so important to have another test called a liver biopsy. This test will take out a piece of your liver tissue to look at.

Doctors will generally treat patients if their ALT levels are high – 2 times above normal. This indicates there is ongoing liver damage that must be treated. Elevated ALT levels also mean your immune system is actively fighting the hepatitis B infection.

## It Is Important to Remember:

- If your ALT level is high, it means something is currently damaging your liver. *Normal levels: Men – 10 to 40 IU/L; Women – 7 to 35 IU/L*
- Most hepatitis B-infected people with normal ALT levels will not get sick, but some can still have liver damage.
- If you have normal ALT levels, a doctor may not recommend treatment unless you have been infected a long time, have an elevated viral load (HBV DNA), or if a liver biopsy reveals liver damage.



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