

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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You can't live without a liver, no fooling. But April Fool's Day or not, to look at the bottles, boxes and packets available on some store shelves, you might think we were all at risk of keeling over immediately due to liver disease! There are pills to detoxify, powders to protect and bottles of liquids claiming to neutralize any invading toxins. Some say they'll prevent the damage done, others promise to repair damage after the fact. Some even offer additional benefits, such as weight loss or improved energy, even help fix PMS and get rid of allergies for you! Are they fooling, or not?

And, do you really need them? What is the science behind the claims? First, let's take a look at what the liver does for us. A healthy liver is supposed to break down and remove toxins. That's part of its job. It does a great job of it too. It is supposed to produce sugar when our blood sugar levels get too low. It is supposed to take the saturated fat that we eat and turn it into cholesterol. Without cholesterol we die, so the liver makes sure we have it.

So if your liver is healthy you don't need any extra pills, capsules or drinks to make it do those things. What little research has been done on a few of the more common ingredients in these products has not been done on healthy livers. Some has been done on rats or other lab animals whose livers were damaged before the study. Some research has been done on people with damaged livers, or on human liver cells taken from damaged livers. There have not been good studies done on humans, or

studies that show consistent benefits from any of these liver tonics. In fact, some of the ingredients such as comfrey, mistletoe, licorice root, even some vitamins can be dangerous, especially if taken in larger doses or with alcohol.

Healthy livers will protect themselves by destroying toxins. They will give us more energy by making sugar when we need energy. There is little to no evidence that any liver supplements will cure allergies or immune problems. Eating a low fat diet, along with proven medications if necessary, is a less risky way to lower cholesterol.

If you want to protect your liver and keep it healthy, there are many reliable things you can do, without spending money on unproved or risky pills. Probably the one that most of us need to work on is to maintain a healthy weight. The more weight we carry around, the more likely some of it will end up packed around and in the liver. Fatty liver disease is more common in overweight and obese people. This doesn't mean you have to get down to a size 6 dress! Just losing 10% of our body weight makes a huge, significant difference in our health.

Many people know of another important step to keeping your liver healthy and happy - avoid too much alcohol. Long term or heavy use of alcohol can definitely damage our livers. Cirrhosis of the liver occurs when alcohol damage causes normal liver cells be replaced by connective tissue. Since connective tissue can't do liver tissue work, our health goes downhill fast.

Another very important way to protect your liver is to read and obey the instructions on medications. Taking too much medication can overload and damage our livers. Common over the counter painkillers containing acetaminophen are definitely risky, especially if taken with alcohol in our system too. Too much of other medications

can damage it too.

If you must work with potentially toxic chemicals for cleaning, painting or removing paint, or pesticides, be sure to wear a mask and open the windows. Get rid of the chemicals with plenty of fresh air before they do any damage.

Here's an easy dish for dinner. You can use different vegetables that your family likes, or a cheese soup if you prefer too. Plenty of veggies will help with weight control. Succotash is a mixture of corn and lima beans. Use green beans if you want. Enjoy!

### Easy Ham and Veggie Casserole

1 10-oz pkg frozen corn	1 10-oz pkg frozen peas and carrots
1 10-oz pkg frozen succotash	3 Tbsp chopped onion
1 can condensed, low fat cream of mushroom soup	
1 lb thin sliced ham steak	pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 400° F. Spray a 3 qt baking dish with cooking spray. Place frozen vegetables in baking dish, sprinkle with pepper and spread soup over top. Cover with foil and bake 40 minutes. Remove from oven, stir vegetables and lay ham steak in pieces on the vegetables. Return to oven and bake uncovered 10 minutes. Remove from oven, turn slices of meat over, and bake again 10 more minutes. Serve hot.

Serves 8.

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