

## Hepatitis C virus causes fatty liver disease with enzyme help

A key enzyme may explain how hepatitis C infection causes fatty liver - a build-up to threatening diseases like cirrhosis and liver cancer, according to a study.

The study showed that an enzyme known to play crucial role in lipid production --fatty acid synthase (FAS) -- was found at higher levels than normal in human liver cells exposed to the hepatitis C virus.

The research, at a preliminary stage, suggests that testing for higher levels of FAS could help determine which patients with hepatitis C virus are likely to develop more serious, long-lasting health consequences prompted by fatty liver.

Nearly 200 million people worldwide are infected by hepatitis C. Seventy percent of them develop chronic liver disease. The infection is the leading reason for liver transplantation in the US.

Unlike hepatitis A and B, there is no vaccine to prevent hepatitis C. Since it is symptom-less, people not aware of being infected until they develop signs of liver failure, sometimes decades after infection.

The virus replicates and mutates quickly, helping it to evade discovery and attack by the immune system and allowing it to slowly wreak damage on the liver.

'Our study has provided new insight into how hepatitis C causes fatty liver,' having 'important implications for future studies and efforts to understand how the virus causes an increase in fatty acid levels,' said Tianyi Wang of the University of Pittsburgh and the study's co-author.

The findings of the study have been published in the online issue of the journal *Hepatology*.

( © IANS / India eNews)