

2026 ACG CLINICAL GUIDELINE SUMMARY: Inpatient Management of Hepatic Encephalopathy (HE)

Implement the latest clinical recommendations for prompt evaluation and management of inpatients with suspected HE

Use the West Haven Criteria (WHC) to Grade HE

GRADE 0-1: Covert HE

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|----------------|--|
| Grade 0 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abnormal psychometric/neuropsychological tests without clinical manifestations |
| Grade 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impaired attention/concentration/sleep Euphoria/anxiety |

GRADE 2-4: Overt HE

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|----------------|--|--|
| Grade 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disoriented to time/place Inappropriate behavior Personality changes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dyspraxia Asterixis Apathy |
| Grade 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Somnolence/semi-stupor Gross disorientation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusion Bizarre behavior |
| Grade 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coma (not responsive to stimuli) | |



Consider factors favoring hospitalization

HE Severity

- All patients with Grade 3 or 4 HE
- Most patients with Grade 2 HE*

Presentation

- New onset of mental status change
- Worsening despite adequate BMs
- Need for exclusion of other mental state causes

Precipitating Factors

- Unclear precipitant
- Need for further evaluation and treatment

Home Support

- Agitated patient
- Likelihood of low medication compliance
- Family cannot adequately supervise

*Select patients that have had a repeat HE episode with consistent presentation at WHC Grade 2 or less (with a known precipitant, if applicable) may only require outpatient management.

If your hospitalized patient with cirrhosis is showing signs of HE, such as an altered mental state, evaluate for:



DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS

Exclude other causes of acute mental status

Sepsis	Diabetes complications
Uremic encephalopathy	Hypoxia or hypercapnia
Electrolyte disorders	Intoxication/withdrawal
Toxin exposure	Dementia/acute psychosis
Endocrine conditions [†]	Neurological conditions [‡]



PRECIPITATING FACTORS

Identify and treat precipitants for HE

Infection	GI bleeding
Constipation	Electrolyte disorder
Acute kidney injury	Dehydration



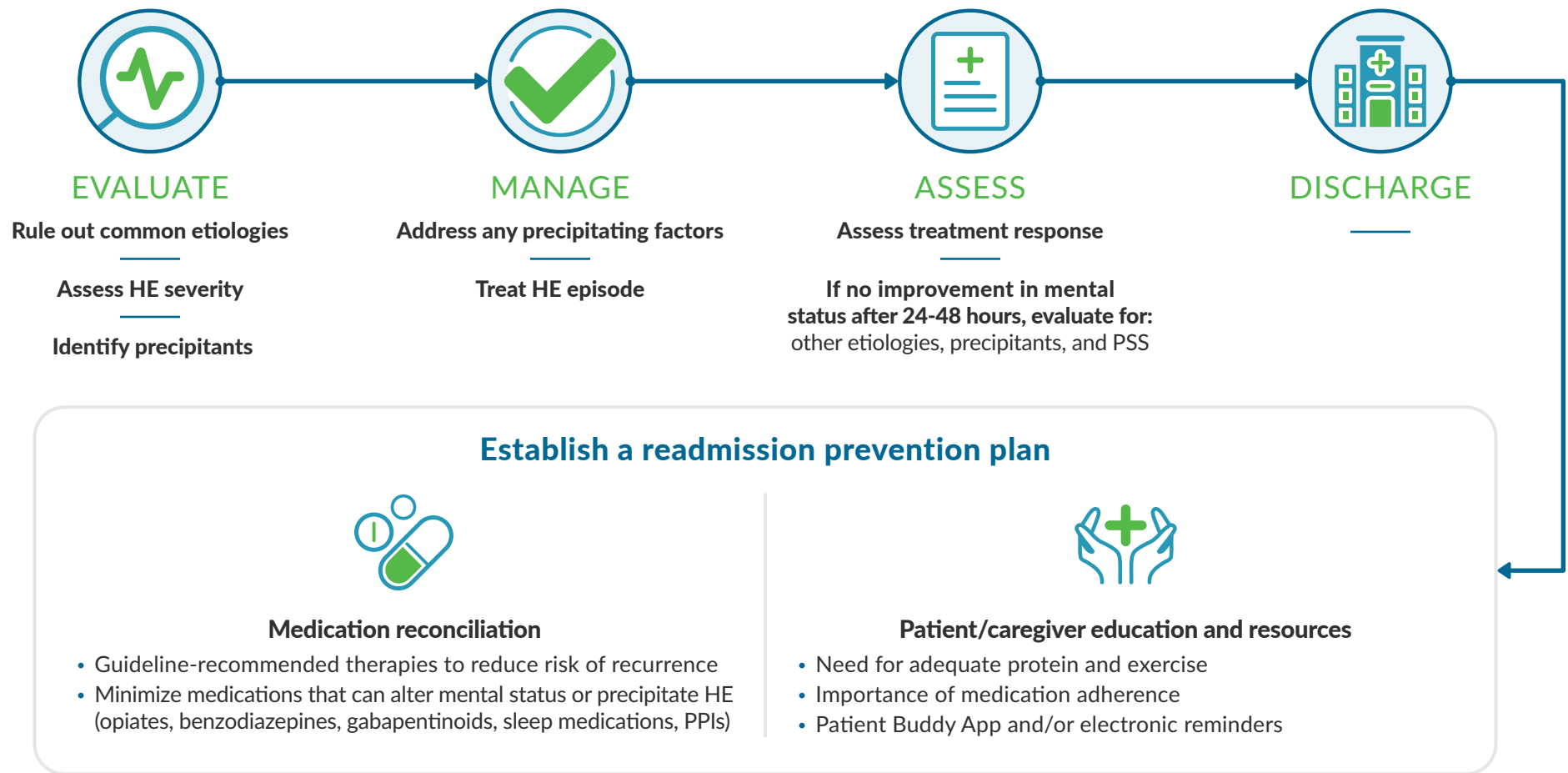
HE SEVERITY

Triage level of care

Grade 2 HE	Floor
Grade 3 or 4 HE	SDU/MICU to prevent complications such as aspiration pneumonia

[†]Includes hypothyroidism/hyperthyroidism, adrenal insufficiency, and panhypopituitarism. [‡]Includes epilepsy, intracranial bleed, stroke, trauma, Wernicke's encephalopathy, malignancy, and neuroinfection.

Inpatient Management Approach: From Initial Evaluation to Discharge



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ACG, American College of Gastroenterology; BM, bowel movement; GI, gastrointestinal; PPI, proton pump inhibitor; PSS, portosystemic shunt; SDU/MICU, step down unit/medical intensive care unit.

Reference: Bajaj JS et al. *Am J Gastroenterol*. 2026;121(3):588-618.

