The size of the liver may be determined by percussion and palpation, as follows:

1. Percuss in the midclavicular line (MCL), beginning below the umbilicus (see Figure 19–11). Begin to percuss over a region of tympany, and move upward. The first dull percussion tone occurs at the lower border of the liver. Determine the upper liver border by beginning percussion over an area of lung resonance (in the MCL) and percussing downward to the first dull tone, usually at the 5th to 7th interspace. Mark each of these locations, and measure the distance from one mark to the other to determine liver size. The normal liver size is 6 to 12 cm in the MCL; however, men have larger livers than women.

2. Conduct bimanual palpation of the liver by placing your left hand under the client at the level of the 11th to 12th ribs and applying upward pressure. Place your right hand below the costal margin, ask the client to take a deep breath, and palpate for the liver border. The liver is not normally palpable in a healthy adult, although it may be in very thin people.