

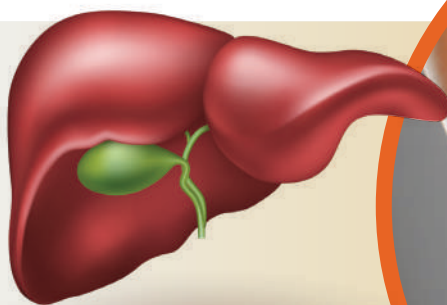
Fatty liver: more common than you think

Non-alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) is the most common liver disease, affecting 17–46% of the developed world. Left undiagnosed, it may lead to complications such as liver cirrhosis and liver cancer. Here are five things to note about this malady.



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What is fatty liver?

All organs, including the liver, contain a little fat, which forms a protective layer and is a source of stored energy. Excess glucose in the bloodstream is converted to fat by the liver. Fatty liver, or steatosis, occurs when the fat content in the liver exceeds 10%. Left unchecked, the fat in liver cells can cause inflammation (steatohepatitis, or NASH), scarring (fibrosis) and hardening of the liver (cirrhosis), all of which are risk factors for liver cancer.

2

Who is at risk?

Diabetes, high cholesterol, viral hepatitis infections, hypertension, and family history of liver disease are common risk factors for NAFLD. Recent research has shown that up to 70% of diabetics have fatty liver disease. Other risk factors include obesity, autoimmune or inherited liver disease, excessive weight loss, and malnutrition.

3

What are the symptoms?

Early-stage NAFLD often has few to no symptoms. As the disease progresses, patients may experience fatigue, lethargy and upper abdominal discomfort. In more advanced stages, patients may develop jaundice, abdominal distension from fluid retention, internal bleeding from swollen blood vessels (varices), confusion and coma — resulting in liver failure.

4

How is NAFLD diagnosed?

The disease can be picked up during a routine check-up through blood tests and a conventional ultrasound scan of the liver. In rare and specific situations, a liver biopsy is required. A new method to diagnose NAFLD is FibroScan. It uses transient elastography, incorporating ultrasound, to quantify the fat content in the liver and measure liver stiffness, which has been proven to correlate with liver fibrosis or scarring. It is a quick, non-invasive and painless test, with a higher level of accuracy. There is also no need for any anaesthetic, no risk of bleeding, and zero downtime.

5

Can NAFLD be prevented or reversed?

NAFLD and NASH can improve and reverse if detected early. The aim of early detection is to prevent disease progression and subsequent development of life-threatening complications, such as liver cirrhosis and liver cancer. Lifestyle changes — balanced diet, zero to restricted alcohol consumption, regular exercise, maintaining healthy body weight — can prevent the disease from progressing. If you already have NAFLD, these steps will help you manage the condition and delay complications; if you don't have it, they can help prevent it. [🔗](#)