

# Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease Information for Patients

## What is Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease?

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease or NAFLD is when fat is increased in the liver and there is not a clear cause such as excessive alcohol use. The fat deposits can cause liver damage.

NAFLD is divided into two types: simple fatty liver and non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH). Most people with NAFLD have simple fatty liver, however 25-30% have NASH. With NASH, there is inflammation and scarring of the liver. A small number of people will develop significant scarring in their liver, called cirrhosis.

People with NAFLD often have one or more features of metabolic syndrome: obesity, high blood pressure, low HDL cholesterol, insulin resistance or diabetes.

NAFLD increases the risk for diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and kidney disease.

Most people feel fine and have no symptoms. Currently, there are no FDA-approved medications to treat NAFLD. However, several medicines are being studied in clinical trials.

## How will I know if I have NAFLD?

Talk to your health provider about screening for NAFLD if you have type two diabetes. Your provider may perform radiology tests (such as ultrasound). A non-invasive test called FibroScan® may be used to measure the amount of fat in your liver and to look for fibrosis (scarring) in your liver. Some people may need a liver biopsy.

## What can I do if I have NAFLD?

### Lose weight

Weight loss is the best treatment. Comprehensive lifestyle modification, which includes changes in diet and increase in exercise, has the greatest, longest lasting weight loss benefit. The good news is that NAFLD can be reversed if you lose more than 4% of your body weight. For example:

- 8 pounds or more (if you're 200 pounds)
- 12 pounds or more (if you're 300 pounds)

Losing more than 10% of your body weight can improve liver inflammation and scarring. Make a weight loss plan with your provider— and exercise to keep weight off.

### Exercise

Start small, with a 5-10 minute brisk walk for example, and gradually build up. Aim for 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise on most days of the week (150 minutes/week). The MOVE! Program is a free VA program to help lose weight and keep it off.

### Avoid Alcohol

Minimize alcohol as much as possible. If you do drink, do not drink more than 1-2 drinks a day. Patients with cirrhosis of the liver should not drink alcohol at all.

### Treat high blood sugar and high cholesterol

Ask your provider if you have high blood sugar or high cholesterol. Certain medications can help lower blood sugar levels and cholesterol.

## What if I have NAFLD and another liver disease?

People can have fatty liver and other liver diseases— such as hepatitis C. People who drink alcohol over many years can also develop alcoholic liver disease including cirrhosis.

Having two liver diseases can cause more liver injury and scarring, so it's even more important to lose weight and exercise—to decrease liver fat and injury. And be sure to talk to your provider about treatment for other liver diseases as well.

## Resources

NAFLD patient guide and video: <https://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>  
MOVE! Weight Management Program: [www.move.va.gov](http://www.move.va.gov)



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