

Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver

Information for Patients

What is fatty liver?

- ▶ Fatty liver is when fat stores increase in the liver. The liver can be damaged and can enlarge.

Who gets fatty liver?

- ▶ Fatty liver most often occurs in people with high blood sugar, obesity, or high cholesterol.

Why is fatty liver named Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver?

- ▶ This kind of fatty liver that is caused by fat stores is called Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver because it is only found in people who don't drink much alcohol.
- ▶ People who drink large amounts of alcohol can get a different kind of fatty liver called Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease.

What can happen with fatty liver?

- ▶ Most people with fatty liver have increased fat stores WITHOUT inflammation of the liver. This is called non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD).
- ▶ Some people with fatty liver have increased fat stores WITH inflammation of the liver. This has a slightly different name and it is called non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH).
- ▶ Usually NAFLD does not cause liver scarring, but NASH can cause liver scarring. NASH is a more serious condition and 1 in 5 people with NASH can develop severe liver scarring, called cirrhosis.

How will I feel with fatty liver?

- ▶ Most people feel fine and have no symptoms.
- ▶ Heart disease, stroke, and diabetes are more common in people with fatty liver.
- ▶ People with cirrhosis can have tiredness, confusion, or fluid in the belly. Some people with cirrhosis develop liver cancer.

How will I know if I have fatty liver?

- ▶ Fatty liver can be found with blood and radiology tests (such as ultrasound).
- ▶ A liver biopsy may help to see if inflammation is present.

Should I ask my provider about fatty liver?

- ▶ Talk to your health provider if you are overweight, or have high blood sugar or cholesterol.

What can I do if I have fatty liver?

1. Lose weight

- ▶ Weight loss is the best treatment
- ▶ Fatty liver can be reversed if you lose:
 - 14 pounds or more (if you're 200 pounds)
 - 21 pounds or more (if you're 300 pounds)
- ▶ Make a weight loss plan with your providers—and exercise to keep weight off.
- ▶ Learn more at www.nutrition.va.gov/WeightManagement.asp.



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2. Exercise

- ▶ Start with a 5-10 minute brisk walk and build up to a 30 minute brisk walk.
- ▶ Build up to 30 minute brisk walks on 5 days per week. Walking helps your liver and heart!
- ▶ The MOVE! Program is a free VA program to help lose weight and keep it off.
- ▶ Learn more at www.move.va.gov.

3. Avoid Alcohol

- ▶ Minimize alcohol as much as possible.
- ▶ If you do drink, do not drink more than 1-2 drinks a day.

4. 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. They will also help reduce fat in the liver.

What if I have fatty liver AND another liver disease?

- ▶ People can have fatty liver, and other liver diseases—such as hepatitis C.
- ▶ People who drink too much alcohol over many years can also develop alcoholic fatty liver disease.
- ▶ Having 2 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.