

FATTY LIVER

(Steatosis)



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

The liver is one of the largest organs in the body and has many functions. Fatty liver is a build-up of fat in the liver cells. Alcohol-related fatty liver occurs in alcohol drinkers. Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) occurs in people who seldom or never drink alcohol. Fat in the liver may cause no problems by itself. In some cases, it may be a sign of more serious problems.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Usually there are no symptoms. The fatty liver condition is often discovered during a routine physical exam, or when medical tests are done for other reasons.
- There may be some pain or tenderness in the upper-right abdomen, behind the ribs. This is where the liver is located.
- Feeling tired.
- Jaundice (yellow skin and eyes).

CAUSES

It is not known what causes fat to build-up in the liver. It is known that fat increases in the liver with a number of conditions or disorders. Eating fatty foods does not cause fatty liver.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Heavy use of alcohol.
- Obesity.
- Diabetes.
- Use of certain drugs.
- Metabolic syndrome (a group of health problems).
- Malnutrition (poor diet).
- High triglycerides (high fat levels in the blood).
- Intestinal bypass surgery for obesity.
- Tuberculosis.
- Pregnancy. It is a rare complication.
- Other uncommon diseases and some poisons.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- There are no specific preventive measures.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Eat a healthy diet. Maintain an ideal body weight.
- Pregnant women should get good prenatal care.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Fatty liver can be partially reversed when the underlying cause is treated or removed.
- In pregnancy, it usually clears up after delivery.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Inflammation of the liver. This is called alcoholic steatohepatitis or nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH).
- Other types of liver problems.
- If untreated in a pregnant woman, it can be life-threatening for the mother and the fetus.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will ask about alcohol and drug use, and do a physical exam. An enlarged liver can often be felt with fingertips during the exam. Blood tests are done to check liver function. Other tests, including a liver biopsy, can confirm fatty liver. In a biopsy, a long needle is used to remove a small bit of liver tissue for viewing with a microscope.
- Simple fatty liver may require no treatment.
- Treatment of any medical condition and lifestyle changes will normally reverse fatty liver.
- Treatment of diabetes includes diet, drugs, or insulin.
- Stop drinking alcohol. For help, join a local support group such as Alcoholics Anonymous.
- For an obesity problem, weight loss is necessary.
- If a pregnancy is far enough along, the recommended treatment is delivery.
- To learn more: American Liver Foundation, 75 Maiden Lane, Suite 603, New York, NY 10038; (800) 443-7872; website: www.liverfoundation.com.

MEDICATIONS

- Drugs to treat fatty liver are being studied.
- Drugs may be prescribed for specific disorders.
- Certain drugs may be stopped if they are a risk factor.
- Weight loss drugs may be used for a short time.
- Vitamin and mineral supplements may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

Start a daily exercise routine, such as walking.

DIET

- Eat a healthy diet that is low in calories, low in cholesterol, with plenty of fruits, vegetables, and fiber.
- Start a weight-loss diet if obesity is a problem.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of fatty liver.
- You need information about weight-loss diets, avoiding alcohol, or starting an exercise routine.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page