

November 2023

Fatty liver a common disorder

Heavy alcohol use can cause a liver disorder known as Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (AFLD). But when the disorder occurs in those who drink little to no alcohol, it's called Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD). Unfortunately, NAFLD is more common than you may think.

The Canadian Liver Foundation says NAFLD is Canada's most common liver disorder. And the most common cause of NAFLD in Canada is obesity. However, NAFLD can also affect those at a healthy weight (with extra fat around the waist) who eat a diet high in sugary and fatty foods.

Small amounts of fat in your liver is normal. But excess becomes a problem: The liver is considered a fatty liver if fat constitutes more than 5% of the liver. This can lead to liver inflammation, which can create damage in the form of scarring. If scarring becomes severe, the liver can't function properly, increasing the risk of liver failure. Early symptoms of NAFLD may include fatigue and pain in the upper right abdominal area. However, usually there are no symptoms until the liver damage is severe.

NAFLD is often associated with metabolic syndrome, a group of risk factors contributing to poor health (large waist circumference, high blood pressure, high blood sugar levels, and high cholesterol and triglycerides). Diabetes, insulin resistance (where your body can't properly use its insulin), high cholesterol and triglycerides, and high blood pressure often accompany NAFLD.

Those with NAFLD who have no medical problems do not require special treatment or medications (and there currently are no medications approved for NAFLD). Since a fatty liver usually develops from poor lifestyle habits, it's recommended to change those poor habits.

WEIGHT LOSS. A gradual loss of one to two pounds weekly is best. Rapid weight loss may worsen existing liver inflammation. Successful weight loss requires attention to diet and physical activity.

DIET. Avoid ultra-processed foods (especially refined fats, sugars, and anything made with them) because these offer few nutrients and no fibre. Dietary fibre is associated with weight reduction, cardiovascular health, diabetes prevention, and other disorders linked with NAFLD. That's why plant-based diets are now often advised for many health problems because plants are a rich source of fibre. That doesn't mean you have to become vegetarian. Just eat more plants: fruit, vegetables, root

Eve Lees has been active in the health & fitness industry since 1979. Now retired, she was a Freelance Health Writer for several publications and gave speaking presentations to business and private groups on various health topics. <https://www.artnews-healthnews.com/health-writing>

Visit Eve's [health column archive](#) in the White Rock Sun

Connect on [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) or follow [Eve's Blog](#)