

## Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease

### What is nonalcoholic fatty liver disease?

Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (or NAFLD for short) is a buildup of fat in the liver that is not caused by drinking alcohol. It is the most common liver disease in the United States.

### What causes it?

The most important cause is being overweight. It also happens to people with diabetes or high cholesterol. Sometimes it happens and we don't know why.

### What's bad about having it?

Some people with NAFLD will get cirrhosis. Cirrhosis is scarring of the liver. It can cause the liver to fail and you might need a liver transplant. Sometimes, people with cirrhosis get liver cancer.

### How do I know if I have it?

Most people with NAFLD don't know they have it. That's because there usually are no symptoms. But sometimes when you have blood tests or ultrasounds for other things, your doctor might find problems with your liver. Your doctor will then do more tests to see if you have NAFLD.

### How is it treated?

If you are overweight, the most important treatment is to lose weight. This can be done through a healthy diet and exercise. Surgery for weight loss is sometimes used for people who are very overweight.

Medicines are sometimes used to treat NAFLD. But for most people, losing weight is the key.

### How do I prevent other liver problems?

If you have NAFLD, there are some things you can do to help prevent more damage to your liver. You should get shots to prevent hepatitis (liver infection). You should also limit how much alcohol you drink.

### What else should I know?

Most people with NAFLD will not get serious liver problems like cirrhosis, especially if they lose weight. But, you should have regular checkups with your doctor to make sure.

### Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

AAFP's Patient Information Resource

<https://familydoctor.org/condition/nonalcoholic-fatty-liver-disease>  
and <https://familydoctor.org/condition/alcohol-abuse>

American Liver Foundation

<https://liverfoundation.org/for-patients/about-the-liver/diseases-of-the-liver/non-alcoholic-fatty-liver-disease/>

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease/naflid-nash>

**November 2020**

Adapted with permission from Wilkins T, Tadod A, Hepburn I, et al. Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease [patient handout]. *Am Fam Physician*. 2013;88(1):online. Accessed April 24, 2020. <https://www.aafp.org/afp/2013/0701/p35-s1.html>

**This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <https://familydoctor.org>.**

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