

Care Gram

Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver/ Nonalcoholic Steatohepatitis

What Is Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD)?

The liver is the largest organ inside the body. It has more than 500 functions, including:

- Storing vitamins and minerals
- Storing and using carbohydrates, proteins, and fats
- Helping in the breakdown of food
- Stopping cuts from bleeding
- Killing germs
- Removing toxins from the body
- Building muscle

Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is a medical condition in which fat builds up in the liver. This buildup of fat is called fatty infiltration. There are two types of NAFLD – nonalcoholic fatty liver and nonalcoholic steatohepatitis.

What Is Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver (NAFL)?

NAFL is a generally harmless condition in which fat builds up in the liver without inflammation. NAFL has become more common as weight gain and obesity have increased and is now the leading cause of liver disease in the United States.

Liver functions for people who have NAFL are normal, and they do not experience symptoms. NAFL is often discovered during imaging tests of the abdomen for other reasons. Although some patients may develop NASH (inflammation of the liver), many do not.

Treatment

There are no treatments for NAFL; however, losing weight can reduce the amount of fat in the liver of those who are overweight or obese. People with NAFL should also receive the hepatitis A and B vaccines, if not already immune, to decrease the chance of further damage to the liver.



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1616-1378
03/12/2025
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What is Nonalcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH)?

NASH is a condition in which fat and scar tissue builds up in the liver and causes inflammation. NASH occurs in those who drink little to no alcohol. People with certain medical conditions such as diabetes, obesity, and insulin resistance develop NASH more frequently than those who do not have these conditions. This combination of disorders is often referred to as “metabolic syndrome.”

Most people who are diagnosed with NASH are between the ages of 40 and 60 years; however, the condition can also occur in children over the age of 10 years. NASH is more common in women than men.

Diagnosis

Standard blood and imaging tests can be used to detect NASH. In some cases, a liver biopsy may be needed to confirm the diagnosis. The biopsy can also help determine the severity of inflammation and detect liver scarring (called fibrosis or in severe cases, cirrhosis).

Treatment

There is no cure for NASH. It is typically a lifelong condition. However, most people with NASH do not develop serious liver problems. In some cases, NASH may get worse over time and lead to cirrhosis.

Treatment of NASH focuses on treating the conditions associated with the disease, such as obesity and diabetes, and monitoring the liver for progression. Some studies suggest people who drink coffee have a lower risk of developing liver scarring, and moderate coffee consumption may be beneficial. People with NASH should be vaccinated against hepatitis A and B if they are not already immune.