

# Care Gram

## Diet and Liver Disease

### NAFLD and NASH

#### **Weight Loss**

People who are overweight or obese have a greater risk of developing non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) or non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH). People with a BMI between 25 and 29.9 are considered overweight, and those with a BMI of 30 or greater are considered obese.

People who are obese and have a larger waist size may need more aggressive weight loss treatment. Generally, females with a waist circumference greater than 35 inches (88 cm) and males with a waist circumference greater than 40 inches (102 cm) are also at higher risk of heart disease and diabetes.

Losing weight can help reduce levels of liver enzymes and insulin and improve your quality of life. However, losing weight takes hard work, and keeping it off requires a sustainable long-term plan. Different approaches and strategies work for different people, so it is important to try not to get discouraged and to keep trying until you find what works for you.

#### **Exercise**

Regular physical activity has many health benefits. In addition to improving physical health, it also lowers stress. You do not need to do intense exercise or go to the gym daily to get these benefits; even small changes like taking the stairs instead of the elevator and getting up frequently if you work at a desk can improve your health.

#### **Limit Sodium/Salt**

Your liver disease may cause a fluid buildup around the liver (ascites) or in your hands and feet (edema). Sodium can worsen these symptoms because it can cause the body to retain water. Limit the sodium in your diet to help your body get rid of this fluid buildup.

Sodium sources include what is naturally found in foods or added to foods. Aim for less than 2,000 mg of sodium per day.



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### Tips to lower sodium in your diet

- Limit or avoid using salt when cooking or seasoning foods – sodium in table, sea, or kosher salt is about 2,300 mg per teaspoon.
- If you are having difficulty and need to add salt to your food, try putting 1/4 of a teaspoon of salt in an empty salt shaker.
  - It can be used throughout the day and will count as 600 mg of sodium.
  - Try to decrease the amount you use over time.
- Avoid using high-sodium spices, seasoning, and condiments – Examples: herbal salts, such as garlic salt, lite or regular soy sauce, meat tenderizers, “cooking” wines, and dressings.
- Buy low-sodium condiments and dressings.
- Buy fresh or plain frozen vegetables without cream or gravy sauces.
- Buy low-sodium or no-added-salt canned soups, vegetables, and other products – low sodium means less than or equal to 140 mg per serving.
- Use fresh poultry, fish, eggs, and lean meats instead of canned or processed.
- Use cheese sparingly – buy low-sodium or naturally lower-sodium cheese, such as ricotta, Swiss, and fresh mozzarella.
- Aim for frozen dinners with less than 700 mg per meal.
- Use only a small portion of flavor packets in box meals, such as Rice-a-Roni® and Hamburger Helper®, or make your own homemade versions.

### **Eat Healthy**

- Follow a healthy meal plan that is well-balanced and nutrient-rich.
  - Eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains (such as whole-wheat bread, brown rice, and oatmeal).
  - Choose low-fat dairy products.
  - Choose lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, and beans.
  - Add fats and oils sparingly and choose plant-based fats and oils, such as olive oil, tub margarine, and nuts.
- Eat adequate amounts of protein – most of our protein is found in meats, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products, nuts, and beans.
- If you have nausea, weight loss, or ascites, try eating 5 to 6 small meals a day.
- Avoid foods that are undercooked or raw.

### **Avoid Alcohol**

Alcohol is toxic to the liver and can worsen the damage caused to the liver. Therefore, avoid alcohol and drinks containing alcohol, such as beer, wine, liquor, and mixed drinks made with liquor.

### **Use Caution with Herbal, Mineral, and Vitamin Supplements**

Ask your doctor before using of any herbal, mineral, vitamin supplements, or herbal medication. Some can worsen your liver disease.