

Living with Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD)

Manor House Surgery

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The liver is a large organ on the right side of the abdomen which is important for storing nutrients and detoxifying the body from harmful substances.

In some people, excess fat can build up in the liver and cause NAFLD. This is usually found by chance, when a blood test checking your liver function is abnormal. An ultrasound scan is used to look at the liver in more detail and confirm any fatty changes.

People tend to collect extra fat in their liver if they make unhealthy lifestyle choices. NAFLD is worsened by drinking alcohol.

NAFLD is not harmful in early stages but may progress to scarring (fibrosis). The doctor will monitor your liver function to prevent this.

NAFLD cannot be treated with medication. The aim is to prevent the liver from scarring with healthy changes to lifestyle and better control of existing medical conditions.

Risk factors for NAFLD

Reversible factors which put you at risk:

- Being overweight
 - Waist circumference >94cm in men, >80cm in women
 - High BMI >30kg/m²
- Unhealthy diet
 - Eating lots of fats and sugars
- Lack of exercise
- Smoking
- Consuming too much alcohol
 - >14 units per week



Medical conditions which increase your risk:

- High blood pressure
- Raised blood cholesterol levels
- Type 2 Diabetes

You may need help from your GP to get these conditions under control.



How does NAFLD affect me?

Symptoms

You may not have symptoms unless your liver becomes more inflamed over time. This can lead to irreversible liver damage (cirrhosis).

You should seek medical help if you develop:

- Abdominal pain or swelling
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Easy bruising or itchy skin



Monitoring

It is important to review your risk of developing liver disease and prevent heart-related problems with:

- Weight and blood pressure checks every year
- Blood sugar test to screen for diabetes



Your GP will ask you about your diet, alcohol intake and smoking status.

How can I change my lifestyle?

Maintaining a healthy weight and lifestyle is the best way to stop NAFLD getting worse and to protect your overall health.

Simple things you can do to improve your liver:



Lose weight gradually by being more physically active and choosing foods with low fat, salt and sugar content.



Eat a well-balanced diet with >5 portions of fruit/veg a day and high in fibre. Drink plenty of water.

If you drink alcohol, do not exceed the recommended alcohol intake (14 units per week).



Exercise for >30min on 5 days per week.

Try walking, running, cycling or swimming to keep active.



Stop smoking, contact your GP for more advice on the services available.

Useful Links

Please take time to read through the following links, which contain extra information and support on lifestyle management.

- British Liver Trust website <https://britishlivertrust.org.uk>
- NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk>
- Patient Info UK website <https://patient.info>
- Change4Life <https://www.nhs.uk/change4life>
- Live Life Better <https://www.livelifebetterderbyshire.org.uk>
- More Life <https://www.more-life.co.uk>

If you have any further questions, you can talk to your GP or practice nurse.

This leaflet was developed using guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and NHS UK.

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