

FATTY LIVER

The liver is the largest organ in the body. It is located in the right upper abdomen, behind the ribs. It is a vital organ in the body. Some of its functions include storing energy; storing vitamins, iron, and minerals; producing proteins, including blood clotting factors; processing waste; producing bile, which is needed for food digestion; metabolizing medications and alcohol; and killing germs that enter the body through the gastrointestinal tract.

Fatty liver is a condition in which fat builds up in the liver. There are two types of fatty liver:

- Non-alcoholic fatty liver (also called NAFL) in which the liver has fat buildup, but is NOT inflamed.
- Non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (also called NASH) in which the liver has fat buildup and IS inflamed

CAUSE

People who drink too much alcohol can get a condition similar to fatty liver. But fatty liver happens in people who do not drink alcohol or drink only a little alcohol. Fatty liver tends to occur more often with people who:

- Are overweight
- Have a condition called diabetes mellitus, which causes blood sugar levels to get too high
- Have high cholesterol
- Take certain medicines

SYMPTOMS

Most people with fatty liver have no symptoms.

DIAGNOSIS

Sometimes, there may be an increase in the liver tests of the blood. Sometimes the liver is slightly enlarged. Fatty liver may also be discovered on an imaging test such as ultrasound, CT, or MRI scan. Some people need a liver biopsy. During this test, a doctor removes a small sample of tissue from the liver. Then another doctor looks at the sample under a microscope to see if inflammation and scarring of the liver are present. A liver biopsy is the only test that can tell for sure if you have NASH. Your doctor might do this test if he or she is not sure if you have NASH or to see how much inflammation and scarring there are in the liver.

TREATMENT

In most instances, the treatment of fatty liver requires control of the underlying conditions. This may include losing weight, controlling high blood sugar and cholesterol.

Since being overweight is by far the biggest risk factor, proper weight management is critical in the management process. Losing weight can be a difficult process. Nonetheless, it must be done as fatty liver can sometimes lead to a very serious scarring of the liver, called "cirrhosis," in which the liver can stop working and requiring a liver transplant.

SUMMARY

Fatty liver is build up of fat in the liver. Its incidence is on the rise due to prevalence of overweight. Proper medical management, monitoring, and guidance are recommended to minimize the risk of disease progression to cirrhosis, which is a serious consequence.

Doctors of Comprehensive Digestive Institute of Nevada are experts in liver diseases, having previously managed large number of complex liver disease patients previously, as well as having multiple, internationally recognized publications on liver diseases. Contact us today for an appointment to help manage your fatty liver.