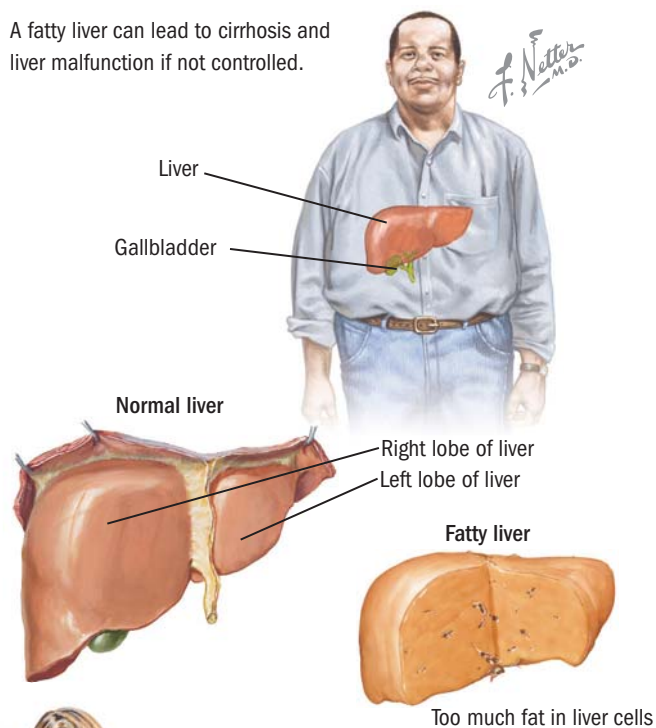


MANAGING YOUR FATTY LIVER

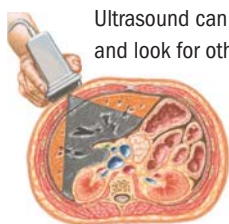
A fatty liver can lead to cirrhosis and liver malfunction if not controlled.



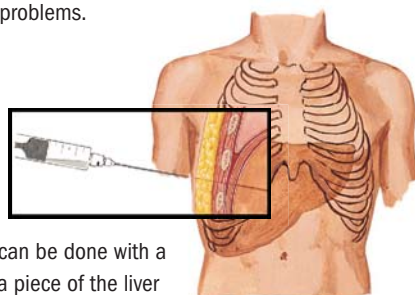
Symptoms may include tiredness and belly pain, but often fatty liver is not noticed until a blood test is done.



The liver may also be larger than normal.



Ultrasound can measure liver size and look for other problems.



If necessary, a liver biopsy can be done with a special needle to take out a piece of the liver and examine it under a microscope.

What Is Fatty Liver?

A fatty liver refers to a collection of too much fat in liver cells that often occurs in patients with diabetes or obesity or patients who drink too much alcohol. A fatty liver by itself is not harmful, but prolonged swelling (inflammation) of a fatty liver can lead to scarring (cirrhosis) and poor functioning of the liver.

Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, or NASH) is inflammation of a fatty liver that is not caused by alcohol or hepatitis. It is more common in overweight people, but the specific cause is unknown. NASH is not transmitted from person to person or from generation to generation. NASH is the most common liver disease in teenagers and the third leading cause of liver disease in adults.

What Are the Symptoms of Fatty Liver?

Most patients with fatty liver or NASH do not know they have it because they usually have no symptoms. Some patients may feel tired or have pain and discomfort in the abdomen (belly), if the liver is much larger than normal.

How Is Fatty Liver Diagnosed?

The doctor may make this diagnosis by accident when testing for another complaint. Often, liver function blood tests, done as part of annual or routine blood work, show results are not normal. In this case, the doctor will take a detailed history and do a physical examination and other studies to rule out common causes of these abnormal results (such as hepatitis, alcohol, or too much iron in the liver). At an examination, the doctor may feel for a liver or spleen that is too large but in most cases this will not be evident on physical examination.

The doctor may also want special x-ray studies and scans of the liver: ultrasound scan, computed tomography (CT), or magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

A diagnosis of NASH is proved by a liver biopsy. In a biopsy, a large needle is inserted into the liver. Then, a small piece of the liver is removed and examined under a microscope.



Manage fatty liver by keeping to a normal weight and eating a healthy low-fat diet.



Include exercise in your daily routine.



Avoid alcohol!

How Is Fatty Liver Treated?

Weight loss and avoiding alcohol are the best ways to treat fatty liver.

If you have NASH and are obese or diabetic or have high cholesterol, you should lose weight and control your blood sugar and lipid levels by eating a good diet and exercising.

Your doctor may try drugs to reduce the liver's fats and inflammation.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Fatty Liver:

- ✓ **DO** realize that often a liver biopsy is not done and fatty liver or NASH is diagnosed by ruling out other causes such as alcohol or virus (called a diagnosis of exclusion).
- ✓ **DO** ask your doctor about drugs that can hurt the liver, such as acetaminophen and some used for diabetes and high cholesterol.
- ✓ **DO** lose weight if you are obese.
- ⊘ **DON'T** drink alcohol. Avoiding alcohol may help get rid of the fat stored in liver cells.
- ⊘ **DON'T** forget that a few patients with NASH can get liver cirrhosis and have complications from liver failure, for example, yellow skin color (jaundice), fluid in and swelling of the belly (ascites), and swelling (edema) of the legs.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse
Tel: (800) 860-8747
Website: <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/diabetes/diabetes.htm>
- American College of Gastroenterology
Tel: (703) 820-7400
Website: <http://www.acg.gi.org>