



## Facts At-A-Glance

- ✚ Fatty liver is the build-up of excess fat in the liver cells.
- ✚ If fat accounts for more than 5-10% of your liver's weight, then you have fatty liver.
- ✚ People tend to develop fatty liver if they have certain other conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, or high triglycerides.
- ✚ About 10-20% of Americans have fatty liver.
- ✚ On its own, fatty liver causes no damage. But the excess fat can lead to inflammation of the liver.
- ✚ If your liver is inflamed, it can become scarred and hardened over time. This can lead to liver cancer or liver failure.
- ✚ People can have an inflamed or fatty liver for many years without experiencing symptoms.

At the American Liver Foundation,  
we are committed to liver health  
and we are here to help you.  
Contact us!



*Your Liver. Your Life.*

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 603, New York, NY 10038-4810  
tel: 212-668-1000 | fax: 212-483-8179  
[www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org)

**National HelpLine:** 800-GO-LIVER (800-465-4837)

The American Liver Foundation is the nation's leading nonprofit organization promoting liver health and disease prevention. We provide research, education, and advocacy for those affected by liver-related diseases, including hepatitis.

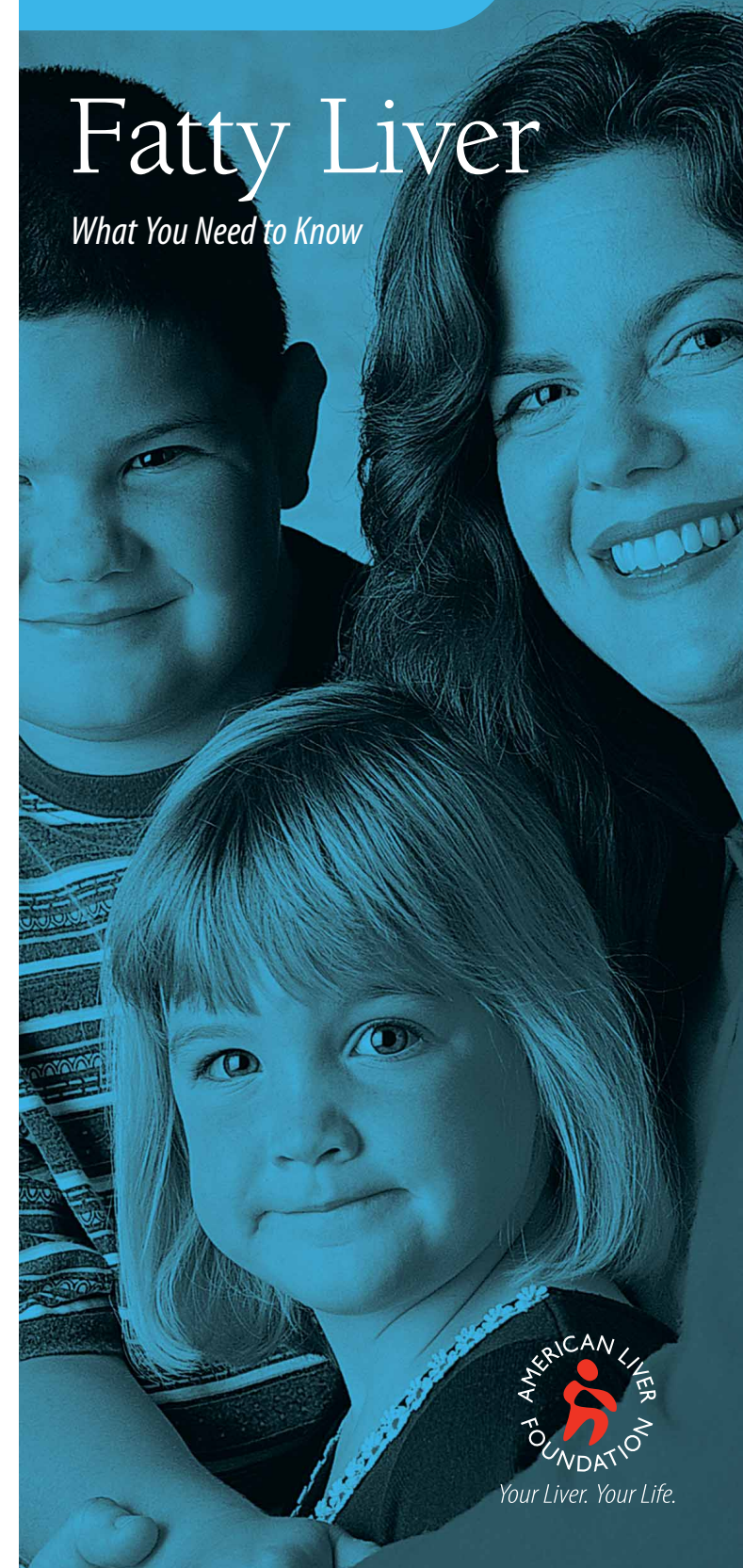
*This brochure has been reviewed by Keith D. Lindor, MD, Professor of Medicine and Dean of Mayo Medical School. The information contained in this brochure is provided for information only and does not constitute medical advice. The American Liver Foundation recommends that you consult your physician before pursuing any course of treatment.*

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THE Q&A SERIES

# Fatty Liver

*What You Need to Know*



*Your Liver. Your Life.*

## The Liver

The liver is the largest organ in the body. It is a very complex organ and has many important functions. These include:

- ✚ Breaking down foods to be stored as energy
- ✚ Storing vitamins, iron, and other minerals
- ✚ Making proteins, including blood clotting factors, to keep the body healthy and help it grow
- ✚ Making bile which is needed for food digestion
- ✚ Metabolizing or breaking down many medications and alcohol

The liver shoulders a heavy workload for the body and most often it does not give you any warning signs that it is sick. Still it should not be taken for granted. Certain conditions that develop, such as fatty liver and steatohepatitis, may be signs of liver injury that can lead to permanent liver damage.

## What is fatty liver?

Fatty liver is just what its name suggests: the build-up of excess fat in the liver cells. It is normal for your liver to contain some fat. But if fat accounts for more than 5-10% of your liver's weight, then you have fatty liver and you may develop more serious complications.

## What causes fatty liver disease?

Eating excess calories causes fat to build up in the liver. When the liver does not process and break down fats as it normally should, too much fat will accumulate. People tend to develop fatty liver if they have certain other conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, or high triglycerides. Most (but not all) fatty liver patients are middle-aged and overweight. Alcohol abuse, rapid weight loss, and malnutrition may also lead to fatty liver. However, some people develop fatty liver even if they have none of these conditions – so everyone should know about it.

## What are the consequences of fatty liver?

Fatty liver may cause no damage, but sometimes the excess fat leads to inflammation of the liver. This condition, called steatohepatitis, does cause liver damage. Sometimes, inflammation from a fatty liver is linked to alcohol abuse; this is known as alcoholic steatohepatitis. Otherwise the condition is called nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, or NASH.

An inflamed liver may become scarred and hardened over time. This condition, called cirrhosis, is serious and often leads to liver failure. NASH is one of the top three leading causes of cirrhosis.

**About 10-20% of Americans have fatty liver. About 2-5% have NASH.**

## What are the symptoms of fatty liver?

A fatty liver produces no symptoms on its own, so people often learn about their fatty liver when they have medical tests for other reasons. NASH can damage your liver for years or even decades without causing any symptoms. If the disease gets worse, you may experience fatigue, weight loss, weakness, and confusion.

**People can have NASH for many years without symptoms, but liver damage may still be occurring.**

## How is fatty liver diagnosed?

Your doctor may see something unusual in your blood test or notice that your liver is slightly enlarged during a routine checkup. These could be signs of a fatty liver. To make sure you don't have another liver disease, your doctor may ask for more blood tests, an ultrasound, a CT scan, or an MRI. If other diseases are ruled out, you may be diagnosed with NASH. The only way to know for sure is to get a liver biopsy. Your doctor will remove a sample of liver tissue with a needle and check it under a microscope.

## How is fatty liver disease treated?

There are no medical or surgical treatments for fatty liver. If you have fatty liver, and in particular if you have NASH, you should:

- ✚ Lose weight
- ✚ Lower your triglycerides through diet, medication or both
- ✚ Avoid alcohol
- ✚ Control your diabetes, if you have it
- ✚ Eat a balanced, healthy diet
- ✚ Increase your physical activity
- ✚ Get regular checkups from a doctor who specializes in liver care

**There are no medical or surgical treatments for a fatty liver or NASH, but improving your diet and increasing your exercise may help prevent or reverse some of the damage.**

## What potential new treatments are being studied?

If you have fatty liver, you should know that scientists are studying whether various medications can help reduce the inflammation on your liver, including new diabetes medications that may help even if you don't have diabetes.