

Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease: Are You At Risk?

(NAPS)—Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is one of the most common liver diseases in the United States. NAFLD is typically a silent disease with few or no symptoms, and most people have no complications. However, some people could develop serious complications such as cirrhosis or liver cancer.

Learn more about NAFLD, factors that increase your risk for NAFLD, and research that is leading the way toward new treatments.

What is NAFLD?

NAFLD is a condition in which excess fat is stored in your liver and the buildup of fat isn't caused by heavy alcohol use.

A more severe form of NAFLD called nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) also causes inflammation and liver damage. NASH can lead to liver cancer, permanent liver scarring called cirrhosis and liver failure. If you develop liver failure, you may need a liver transplant to survive.

Who is at risk for NAFLD?

If you have certain conditions such as obesity, high cholesterol or type 2 diabetes, you might be at risk for NAFLD. As obesity rates have increased in the United States, NAFLD has also become more common. Research suggests that NAFLD currently affects 30% to 40% of U.S. adults and up to 10% of U.S. children.

Although NAFLD may occur in people of all races and ethnicities, it is most common among Hispanics, followed by non-Hispanic whites. NAFLD is less common among African Americans.

Are there treatments for NAFLD?

Weight loss can improve NAFLD. For people who have NAFLD and are overweight or have obesity, doctors may recommend gradual weight loss through healthy food choices and physical activity.

At this time, no medicines have been approved to treat NAFLD or its severe form, NASH.

Progress in NAFLD Research

Medical research is seeking to bet-



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ter understand and treat NAFLD. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), conducts and supports NAFLD research. In the past decade, NIDDK-supported researchers have discovered that specific genes play a role in causing NAFLD. These genes may help explain why NAFLD is more common in some racial and ethnic groups than in others.

NIDDK-sponsored studies are also testing possible treatments for NAFLD. For example, an early study suggested that the natural form of vitamin E and a diabetes medicine called pioglitazone may improve some aspects of NASH in adults. More research is needed to see if these treatments are safe and effective.

The Future of NAFLD Treatment

The NIDDK, which marks its 70th anniversary this year, continues to invest in research that will deepen our understanding of NAFLD and may lead to new ways to treat this liver disease and prevent its complications.

To learn more about NAFLD and NIDDK's liver diseases research, visit the NIDDK website.