



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Diet and Non Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

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What does the liver do?

Your liver carries out many important jobs that are vital for life, such as;

- Processing of nutrients from food
- Storing energy, vitamins and minerals
- Breaking down chemicals, poisons, drugs and alcohol
- Controlling cholesterol

What is Non Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD)?

Non Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease is where there is a build up of fat in the liver of people who do not have an excessive alcohol intake.

Over a period of time, if untreated, fatty liver may lead to inflammation (hepatitis) and scarring (fibrosis). It may develop into Non Alcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH) and progress to cirrhosis. This is non reversible liver damage which can be life threatening.

What are the causes?

- One in five people in the UK have non alcoholic fatty liver disease
- Fatty liver is more likely to develop if you;
 - Have high blood cholesterol or triglyceride levels
 - Have type 2 diabetes
 - Are overweight or obese
 - Have insulin resistance

What is the treatment?

There is no specific treatment for non alcoholic liver disease.

There is good evidence that gradual weight loss and increasing your activity levels can reduce the fat stores in your liver.

Maintaining a healthy weight and active lifestyle will help you manage your condition.

Diet and lifestyle advice

1. Maintain a healthy weight
2. Reduce dietary intake of saturated fat and sugar
3. Include plenty of fruit and vegetables in your diet
4. Reduce alcohol intake
5. Increase activity levels
6. Maintain a healthy blood pressure

Maintaining a healthy weight

If you are overweight (body mass index of 25 or above), losing weight can help reduce the amount of fat in your liver. It can also improve blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and blood sugar.

To lose weight you could try to:

- Ensure you have regular meals and include starchy carbohydrates (such as bread, rice, pasta, potato) at each meal.
- Aim to fill half of your plate with vegetables at meal times (this will reduce your overall calorie intake and help to stop you feeling hungry between meals).
- Reduce your portion sizes at meal times.
- Cut down on puddings, sugary and fatty foods.
- Only snack if you are hungry or snack on fruit.
- Increase activity/exercise levels.

'Crash diets'

Following 'crash', or 'fad', diets and losing weight too quickly may worsen the problems with your liver.

Therefore it is important to lose the weight gradually (no more than 1-2lbs or 0.5-1kg a week) following a healthy diet as discussed in this diet sheet.

Weight loss greater than 1kg/2lbs per week is associated with worsening liver function.

Avoid diets that:

- Promise a quick fix
- Recommend magical fat-burning effects of foods (e.g. grapefruit)
- Promote the avoidance of a whole food group, such as carbohydrates or dairy
- Promote eating mainly one type of food (e.g. cabbage soup or eggs)
- Suggest easy, rapid weight loss (more than 2lbs a week)
- Recommend eating foods only in particular combinations
- Make claims that sound 'too good to be true'
- Focus only on your appearance rather than on health benefits

How to reduce dietary intake of saturated fat

Reducing the amount of total fat and saturated fat, in the diet, helps to:

- Reduce blood fat levels
- Reduce fat stores in the liver

Saturated fats are found in foods such as; fatty meats, fried foods, butter, cheese, pastry, cakes, biscuits and crisps.

Replacing saturated fats with mono- and poly-unsaturated fats can be beneficial (olive oil, olives, rapeseed oil, avocado, nuts, seeds, sunflower, safflower, soya and corn) but they should be used sparingly.

These changes can help reduce the fat content of the diet:

- Use semi skimmed, 1% fat or skimmed milk
- Choose margarines and oils based on olive or sunflower oil and consider reduced fat options
- Swap to low fat, healthy or diet yoghurts
- Try grating cheese rather than slicing, or use reduced fat cheese or cottage cheese
- Swap to low calorie/extra light mayonnaise, salad dressings, vinaigrette
- Choose lean cuts of meat, removing all visible fat and removing the skin from poultry
- Use fat-free cooking methods, i.e. grilling, steaming, microwaving, boiling, baking
- Reduce intake and frequency of high fat snacks, for example, cakes, biscuits, crisps, chocolate and pastry products

Reduce intake of sugary foods and drink

Foods and drinks high in sugar include; sweets, sugary fizzy drinks, chocolate, biscuits, cakes, sugary breakfast cereals.

Cutting back on foods high in sugar can reduce overall calories from the diet so can help regulate weight.

Instead of sugary, fizzy drinks and juice drinks go for water or unsweetened fruit juices or cordials.

If you are hungry in between meals try a healthier snack option such as fruit or a low fat/ low sugar yoghurt.

Maintaining a healthy blood pressure

Limiting the salt in your diet helps to manage your blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure (hypertension) you may also be on blood pressure medication.

Some salt in our diet comes from what we add in cooking or at the table. However, a lot of salt in our diet can be “hidden” in the food we eat. Here are some tips to reducing the salt in your diet.

- Avoid adding salt to food at the table
- Add only a small pinch of salt during cooking – use alternative flavourings instead such as black pepper or fresh/dried herbs and spices
- Prepare foods from fresh where possible
- If having tinned foods, choose those without added salt, e.g. tuna in spring water not brine
- Avoid too many packet or tinned soups, sauces in jars/packets and stock cubes/gravy mixes as these are all very high in salt
- Choose unsalted versions of snacks like nuts and crisps

Fruit and vegetables

We are advised to include at least five portions of fruit and vegetables in our diet each day. These might be fresh, frozen, tinned or dried.

A portion is 80g, or the equivalent;

- One banana, apple, pear or similar sized fruit
- Two satsumas or plums
- Handful of grapes (about twelve)
- A dessert bowl of salad
- Seven cherry tomatoes
- One heaped teaspoon of dried fruit

Ways to include more in the diet;

- Add chopped or dried fruit to breakfast cereal
- Add salad to sandwiches
- Have fruit or raw vegetables as snacks
- Include fruit in puddings
- Buy frozen vegetables so they are always at hand

Alcohol

Drinking large quantities of alcohol can increase fat stores in the liver. Alcoholic drinks are often high in calories and sugar too.

Speak with your doctor for advice regarding safe levels of alcohol intake.

Both men and women are advised to avoid exceeding 14 units of alcohol per week, to keep associated health risks to a low level

If you do drink as much as 14 units per week, it is best to spread this evenly over 3 days or more

If you wish to cut down the amount you're drinking, a good way to help achieve this is to have several alcohol free days each week

How many units do drinks contain?

- 125ml of 12% wine = 1.5 units
- 175ml of 12% wine = 2 units
- 250ml of 12% wine = 3 units
- Pint of lower strength lager/beer/cider (3.6%) = 2 units
- Pint of stronger lager/beer/cider (5.2%) = 3 units
- Can of lager/beer/cider (440ml 5%) = 2 units
- Single measure/25ml of spirit (40%) = 1 unit

Please note: drinks with higher % alcohol will contain more units of alcohol

Activity

Regular exercise can help with weight loss, energy levels and mood. It can also help to improve blood glucose control in diabetes.

Try to be as active in your daily routine as you can.

- Take the stairs rather than the lift
- Avoid using the car for short journeys, if you can
- Be active around the house/at work
- Consider activities such as walking or swimming

If you are not used to exercise you may want to check with your doctor before starting.

Goal setting

Making changes to your diet can be difficult. It is often easier to ensure that you don't try to change too much at one time.

Aim for one to two small changes at a time.

Prioritise the changes which are most important for you.

Once you are doing these routinely then you may be able to add in further changes.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Admin Team, Nutrition & Dietetic Department, York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 725269, or email nutrition&dietetics@york.nhs.uk

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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