

UNDERSTANDING FATTY LIVERS

IT IS NORMAL TO HAVE A SMALL AMOUNT of fat in the liver, but if this is in excess of five to 10 per cent of the total weight of the liver, you may have liver disease, either alcoholic or non-alcoholic liver disease. In any case, you have what is known as fatty liver.

Fatty liver can occur after drinking moderate or large amounts of alcohol. It can even occur after a short period of heavy drinking (acute alcoholic liver disease).

Genetics or heredity plays a role in alcoholic liver disease in two ways: It may influence your alcohol tolerance level and your likelihood of developing alcoholism. It may also affect levels of liver enzymes involved in the breakdown (metabolism) of alcohol.

In addition, other factors that may cause an enlarged liver are:

- Hepatitis C
- Too much iron in your blood
- Being overweight
- Diet

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is by far the number one cause of this condition.

There are also people who have what is called non-alcoholic steatohepatitis which is similar to alcoholic liver disease, but occurs in people who don't drink a lot, or even teetotalers who don't drink at all.

This type can lead to serious problems as

it may cause scar tissue in the liver, called cirrhosis. Over time, this can lead to liver cancer, liver damage and failure, or liver-related death. If you have steatosis, you may develop diabetes. You might also have a significant risk of cardiovascular complications and end stage liver failure.

Often, there may not be any symptoms to NAFLD. Some possible symptoms are:

- Pain in your upper right abdominal area
- Fatigue
- Weight loss

If you are showing any yellowing of the whites of your eyes or skin — which is jaundice — you should see a doctor immediately as this can also be a sign of serious liver failure.

The effects of this condition can be reduced by making simple diet and lifestyle changes, and in most cases can even turn it around completely.

HERE ARE SOME STEPS YOU CAN TAKE:

- If you drink alcohol — stop.
- If you smoke — stop.
- If you are overweight, lose weight slowly, with proper guidance and professional help, until you reach your ideal weight. (DON'T go on a crash diet, it will make it worse!)
- Get plenty of exercise.
- If you are diabetic, keep it under control with normal glucose levels.
- Eat a healthy diet. Avoid fast food and junk foods.

In any case, if you have this condition, check with your doctor what needs to be done as it can cause damage to other organs and contribute to serious health problems. ■



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