

Nonalcoholic Steatohepatitis (NASH)

What is nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH)?

Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH)*, now known as metabolic dysfunction-associated steatohepatitis (MASH), is an advanced form of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD)*, now known as metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD), in which there is extra fat and inflammation (swelling) of the liver.

Who is at risk for NASH?

NASH tends to develop among people who are overweight or obese, have diabetes, high cholesterol, and high triglycerides. NASH most often occurs among people who are between the ages of 40 and 60 but can occur in any age group. It is more common in women than men.

Symptoms

NASH may not cause symptoms for years. It, like NAFLD, can be a “silent disease” of the liver. When symptoms occur, they can include feeling very tired and having pain in the upper right side of your abdomen, which is where the liver is located.

How does NASH affect the liver?

People with NASH are at higher risk for developing scar tissue of the liver. Mild or moderate scarring is called fibrosis. Advanced scarring is called cirrhosis.

Complications

If NASH causes scar formation in the liver, symptoms can become more serious. Some symptoms can include fluid buildup in the belly, yellowing of skin and eyes (jaundice), severe itching, and spider vein blood vessels beneath the skin’s surface. People who have NASH that advances to cirrhosis may experience additional complications, including liver cancer. In the U.S., NAFLD affects between 80 and 100 million individuals, among whom nearly 25% progress to NASH. About 11% of NASH patients will develop cirrhosis or liver failure. NASH has become the number one cause of liver transplantation in the U.S.

Treatment

Weight loss through change in diet and exercise is often the first treatment recommendation. Doctors also recommend controlling other health issues such as diabetes and cholesterol. They may suggest adding Vitamin E and coffee to your diet. These products will not cure NASH, but they may help keep liver damage from getting worse. Speak to your doctor about a new treatment option for NASH patients who have progressed to fibrosis.

To learn more about NASH simply scan this QR code or view all of our free resources available in our Resource Center: liverfoundation.org/resource-center.

*The nomenclature for nonalcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) has recently changed to metabolic dysfunction-associated steatohepatitis (MASH). Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) has been renamed to metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD). Fatty liver disease is now called steatotic liver disease.

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For questions about liver wellness and disease, or for emotional support to patients at the point of crisis and information on local resources including physician referrals, please contact our Helpline at 1-800-465-4837.

