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A Silent Killer in Your Liver

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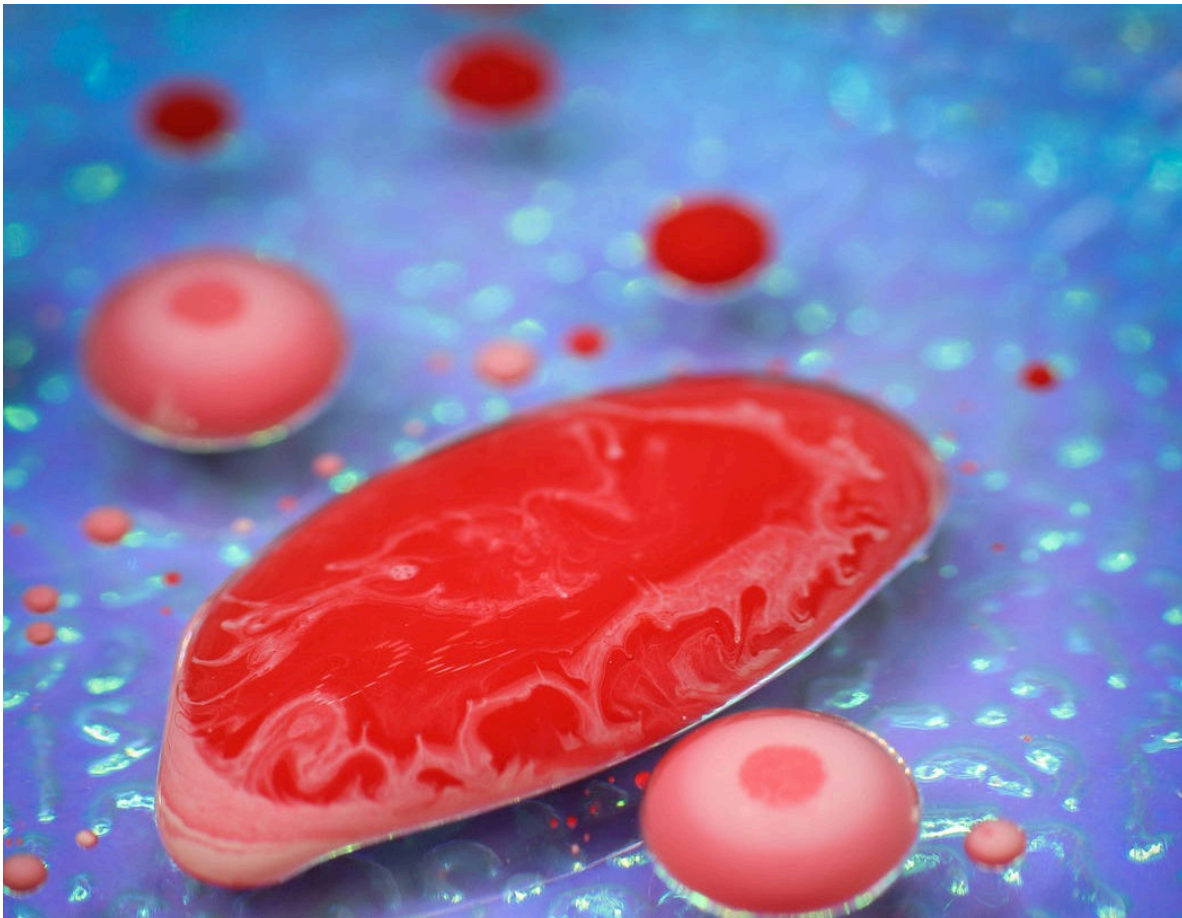


3 min read

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A Bite-Sized Read for Your Health and Waistline

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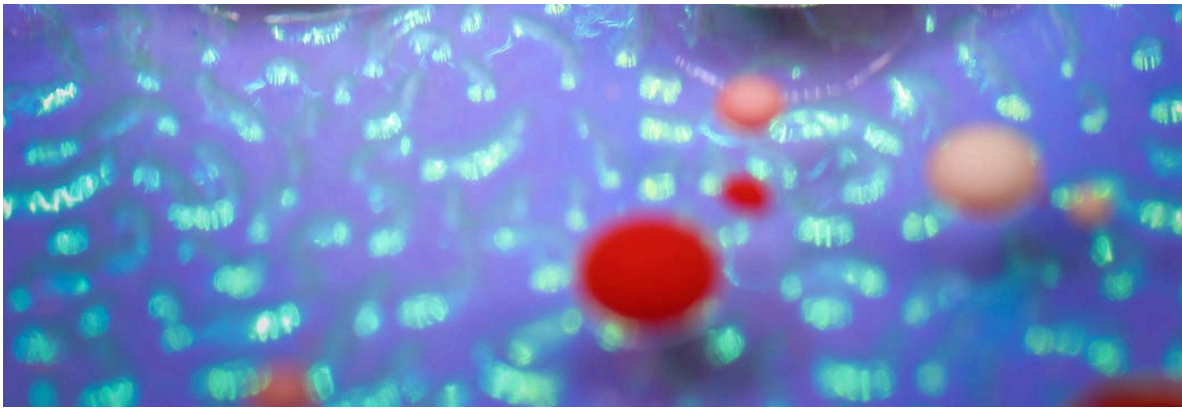


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October is National Liver Health Month, which makes it the perfect time to bring attention to a condition that often flies under the radar. Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, or [NAFLD](#), has been renamed Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease, [MASLD](#). No matter what you call it, the reality is that too many people are affected by this condition, and most don't even know it!

Just how prevalent is it? According to the National Institute of Health, the global prevalence of NAFLD among people with type 2 diabetes between [1989 and 2018 was over 55%](#). Nearly [40%](#) also had a more advanced form called [non-alcoholic steatohepatitis](#), now referred to as Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease. [A 2015 projection estimated](#) that NAFLD would increase by more than 20% by 2030, growing from [83 million to 101 million people](#)! [The American Liver Foundation reports](#) that about 100 million people in the United States are affected, which means roughly 1 in every 4 Americans! It is the [most common form of liver disease in children](#) and has [more than doubled](#) in the past two decades.

How did we get here? The new name gives us a better understanding of the underlying issue. [MASLD develops](#) when fat builds up in the liver cells in a way *not* caused by alcohol. Normally, the liver carries *some* fat, but if [more than 5 to 10%](#) of the liver's weight is fat, the organ swells and

its function becomes impaired. In the more advanced form, fat is accompanied by [inflammation and tissue damage](#), which raises the risk of [fibrosis](#), [cirrhosis](#), and even [liver cancer](#).

Why is it silent? [Diagnosis for MASLD](#) can be tricky as it can require a biopsy, or CT scan, after specific blood work. It also tends to fly under the radar because MASLD is strongly linked with conditions like [obesity](#), [metabolic syndrome](#), and [type 2 diabetes](#). Yet, this does not mean people in smaller bodies are in the clear! Anyone can develop it. The [biggest risk factors](#) are obesity, insulin resistance, high cholesterol, high triglycerides, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, polycystic ovarian syndrome, and hypothyroidism.

What's more, symptoms are also often silent for years. When they do appear, they often look like other things. Typical symptoms include [fatigue](#), [weakness](#), [abdominal pain on the upper right side](#), [weight loss](#), [jaundice](#), or [spider-like blood vessels](#) on the skin. Left unaddressed, more advanced cases can lead to [fluid retention](#), [internal bleeding](#), [confusion](#), and [muscle wasting](#). These overlap with many other health conditions, which makes awareness and routine conversation with your healthcare provider all the more important.

The good news is that prevention and even reversal are possible! The key is really lifestyle changes. The medical community often points to [weight loss](#), though the quality of that loss matters. Losing muscle instead of fat will not help! A nutrition strategy that emphasizes [whole foods](#), [lean protein](#), [fiber-rich fruits and vegetables](#), [quality fats](#), and [truly whole grains supports the liver](#). On the flip side, limiting ultra-processed foods, sugary cereals, flavored yogurts, baked goods, ice cream, and sweetened beverages [reduces fat buildup in the liver](#). Sugar, in particular, has been shown to [contribute directly to liver fat](#).

Managing [cholesterol and triglycerides through nutrition and movement](#) is also key. Regular activity helps [improve insulin sensitivity and metabolic health](#), which can help protect the liver. Additionally, [coffee](#) may offer some protective effects, though research suggests it could take two to three cups per day and it's important to balance coffee consumption with quality sleep. Strategic supplementation can play a role, too. [Omega-3 fatty acids](#), [vitamin E](#), [curcumin](#), [milk thistle](#), [green tea](#), [ginger](#), and [garlic](#) all show promise in supporting liver health.

The bottom line is that liver health is closely tied to our daily habits. MASLD is common, serious, and often goes unnoticed until it's advanced. The best time to take action is *before* it becomes a significant problem which means making healthful nutrition and lifestyle choices *now*. National Liver Health Month is an opportunity to put the spotlight on this vital organ and remind us that prevention is possible with awareness.