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Understanding a MASH Diagnosis: What It Means and What to Expect

It's normal to have a lot of questions when you're diagnosed with this advanced form of liver disease. Here's what to know about the road ahead.



4:13

A MASH Diagnosis Doesn't Mean My Story Is Over

Jeff's MASH diagnosis came with questions, concerns, and uncertainty. Susan offers advice on preparing for the road ahead and safeguarding liver health.

advanced liver disease can come as a surprise.^[1]

Not only is MASH a relatively unknown condition, but until 2023, it wasn't even called MASH. It was known as nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, or NASH, a serious form of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease. (The [name was changed](#) to remove the stigma associated with the terms "alcoholic" and "fatty.")^[2]

MASH occurs when fat builds up in the liver, which can cause inflammation and, eventually, liver damage. "People with a lot of inflammation are at higher risk for getting scarring, called fibrosis," says [Kara Wegermann, MD](#), a gastroenterologist and transplant hepatologist at Duke Health in Durham, North Carolina, and a volunteer for the [American Liver Foundation](#). "And the scarring ... is the driver of liver-related outcomes, [such as complications from cirrhosis or [liver cancer](#)]."

If you've been diagnosed with MASH, here's what you should know about it and what you can do to help safeguard your health.

What I Wish I Knew: MASH Progresses Differently for Everybody

— Jeff Beckley, diagnosed with MASH in 2024



MASH is the last and most severe stage of metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease, an “umbrella term for fat in the liver in people with metabolic risk factors [such as [obesity](#) and [type 2 diabetes](#)],” says Dr. Wegermann.^[3]

When MASH progresses from fibrosis to [cirrhosis](#) — a severe form of liver scarring that damages the liver — it can shorten a person’s life expectancy. In the early stages of cirrhosis, with no complications of [liver disease](#) (known as compensated cirrhosis), life expectancy can be many years. But if MASH progresses and there are other complications (called decompensated cirrhosis), the average life expectancy is seven years.^[4]

Approximately 5 to 12 percent of people with MASH end up with cirrhosis.^[3]

“Scarring or fibrosis progresses about a stage every seven years. And there are five stages, going from zero to four,” Wegermann explains. “So it takes at least a decade — if not multiple decades — to get to cirrhosis.”

What I Wish I Knew: MASH Can Lead to Cirrhosis — but Not Always

— Susan Avallone, diagnosed with MASH in 2003



To reduce your risk of cirrhosis, it's important to schedule regular checkups with your doctor. "If [routine monitoring] is suggestive of no scarring or fibrosis, then you should continue to work with your doctor on managing things like your weight, [cholesterol levels](#), and [blood pressure](#) with a healthy diet and regular exercise," says Wegermann.

But if you do start to show signs of scarring or fibrosis, you may want to meet with a hepatologist, a doctor who specializes in liver disease, she adds. "It's important for people with stage 2 fibrosis and up to see a hepatologist." People who have more advanced liver disease may be able to receive further MASH treatments, including medication, she says.

What Your Doctor Wants You to Know: MASH Can Be Managed

MASH is a chronic condition, which means it can be managed. "Think about it like diabetes or high blood pressure," says Wegermann. "It's something that's going to be with you every day, and you may not feel it, but it could potentially get worse without appropriate monitoring and treatment."

Don't be afraid to speak up and ask your doctor any questions you have, she adds. And if you prefer to work with a specialist, such as a hepatologist, to manage your

FAQ

What is MASH?

MASH is an advanced form of inflammatory liver disease. Left unmanaged, it can lead to cirrhosis (severe liver scarring) and, eventually, liver failure.

What are the symptoms of MASH?

How is MASH diagnosed?

How is MASH treated?

Can MASH be reversed?

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