

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD): assessment and management

Information for the public

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Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease – the care you should expect

This information explains the care that NICE has said works best for people who have or may have non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). It covers children (from 1 year up to 16 years), young people (16 up to 18 years) and adults (18 and over). It will help you, your family and carers know what to expect from health and care services.

Your healthcare team should know about what NICE has said in its guideline on NAFLD. Talk to your doctor if you don't think you are getting the care NICE has said you should have.

Why is this important for you?

NICE aims to help people get the best care no matter who they are or where they live. The

guideline aims to:

- help doctors understand who is more likely to get NAFLD
- make sure you go for regular check-ups if needed
- make sure doctors explain what treatments are available to you.

What is NAFLD?

NAFLD is a build-up of fat in the liver. About 2 to 3 people in every 10 have this condition. Even young children can have NAFLD. In most people it is not harmful, but sometimes it can get worse, causing the liver to scar (fibrosis). In a small number of people, it can lead to cirrhosis (advanced scarring of the liver). This can cause the liver to stop working completely.

Having NAFLD can make you more likely to develop diabetes, high blood pressure or kidney disease. If you already have diabetes, NAFLD means you are more likely to have heart problems.

Finding out if you have NAFLD

NAFLD is often seen in people who have diabetes or have metabolic syndrome (a combination of linked conditions including high blood pressure and obesity). If a doctor thinks that you might have NAFLD they should ask about your drinking habits to rule out alcohol-related liver disease first. Routine blood tests that look at your general liver health might not pick up NAFLD.

Most adults find out they have NAFLD when they are being tested for something else.

Finding out if children and young people have NAFLD

Children and young people who are more likely to have NAFLD should have a liver ultrasound. This includes children and young people with type 2 diabetes or metabolic syndrome. If a scan shows that they don't have NAFLD they should have another scan every 3 years.

Children with suspected NAFLD should be seen by a doctor who specialises in liver conditions.

What happens if I have NAFLD?

Losing weight and exercising more can help people with NAFLD. Many people find that these simple changes can help NAFLD improve or stop it getting worse.

Alcohol doesn't cause NAFLD but drinking may make it worse. This means it is important to stay within the government's alcohol unit guidelines.

Can I carry on taking statins if I have NAFLD?

If you are taking statins you should carry on taking them unless your doctor tells you to stop. This is because although there is not any evidence that they can treat NAFLD they help with other conditions that people with NAFLD may have such as diabetes. There is also no evidence that people with NAFLD are more likely to have very rare statin-related liver problems than other people.

How often should my liver be checked for scarring?

NAFLD progresses slowly and it is difficult to tell whose liver disease will get worse. This means you will have to have check-ups to see if your liver is scarring. These will take place every 3 years for adults and every 2 years for children and young people. At each of these check-ups you should be given information about changes that you can make to your lifestyle to prevent your liver from scarring.

What happens if my liver starts to scar?

Adults and young people with scarring of the liver should be seen by a doctor who specialises in liver conditions. Children with NAFLD should already be under the care of a specialist. People over 16 years with liver scarring should be monitored for cirrhosis – you can read more about this in the [cirrhosis](#) information for the public.

The specialist may be able to start you or your child on treatments that can help. These treatments can only be started by specialist liver doctors. People taking these treatments

should be checked after 2 years to make sure the treatments are helping.

Making decisions together

You should be part of all decisions about your care so you can agree which treatments are likely to suit you or your child best. Your healthcare team should involve you by:

- talking and listening to you so that they understand what matters to you
- giving you all the information you need so that you can make your mind up
- explaining why they think something that is mentioned here won't work for you, and discussing other options you could try instead
- giving you details for someone in your care team that you can contact if you have any questions.

There is more information about how you should be involved in your care on our [website](#).

Questions you or your child could ask

About NAFLD

- What causes NAFLD?
- What stage is my NAFLD at? Has my liver started to scar?
- What will happen if my NAFLD gets worse? How will I know if it is getting worse?
- Is there anything I can do to stop it getting worse?
- What symptoms does NAFLD cause? What can I do to help ease them?
- Does it run in families?
- Are there other conditions linked to NAFLD?

About tests

- What tests will I need?
- What do they involve?
- What risks are there?
- Will the tests hurt?
- How long will I need to wait for the results?

About your treatment

- Are there any medicines that I can take?
- Do I need to keep taking my medicines even when I feel well?
- Are there any medicines that I can't take?
- What are the risks and benefits of the treatment you have offered me?
- Are there any clinical trials that I can take part in?
- How often will I need to come for check-ups?

About sources of information and support

- Can you give me some information to take away?
- Can you put me in touch with services that will help me lose weight or exercise more?

Where can I find out more?

- British Liver Trust, 0800 6527330
www.britishlivertrust.org.uk
- The Children's Liver Disease Foundation, 0121 2123839
www.childliverfoundation.org

- Liver4Life, 0800 0743494
www.liver4life.org.uk
- NHS Choices healthy eating pages
www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthy-eating/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx

You can also go to [NHS Choices](#) for more information on [NAFLD](#).

NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

What are NICE guidelines?

NICE gives advice to staff working in health and social care. Our guidelines help them to give the best care to people with different conditions and needs. We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by NAFLD and staff who treat it. All the decisions are based on the best research available. You can read the [guideline](#) written for people who work in health and care services.

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Accreditation

