



Royal Cornwall Hospitals
NHS Trust

A photograph of several ripe apples hanging from a tree, with green leaves and branches visible. The apples are a mix of red and yellow colors. The photo is framed within a rounded rectangle on a green background.

**The self-management of
Non-alcohol related
fatty liver disease
(NAFLD)**

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for people who have been diagnosed with non-alcohol related fatty liver disease. It explains what this is and how it can be managed by adopting a healthy lifestyle. It provides self help steps and where to find additional information and support.

What is the liver?

The liver is one of your body's most vital organs. It is found under your rib cage on the right upper side of your abdomen. It is a reddish-brown colour and is made of two lobes that sit over your gallbladder and parts of your pancreas and intestines.

Main functions of the liver include:

- aiding digestion
- breaking down food to make and store energy
- fighting infections
- storing iron, vitamins, and other essential chemicals
- clearing the blood of drugs and poisonous substances.

What is liver disease?

There are three stages of liver disease:

1. **Healthy Liver**
2. **Fatty liver** (also known as non-alcohol related fatty liver disease or NAFLD) – too much fat builds up in the cells of the liver
3. **Liver Cirrhosis** – Irreversible scarring that prevents the liver from working properly.



What is NAFLD?

A healthy liver will have little to no fat, but if fat has started to build up in your liver, this can lead to inflammation and even scarring. It is thought that 1 in 3 people in the UK have early stage NAFLD. Many people will not know they have NAFLD and won't develop serious health problems.

NAFLD is in most cases due to a combination of eating more calories than the body needs and leading a more inactive lifestyle. This means that it usually (but not always) occurs in people who are overweight or obese. Other groups associated with increased risk of NAFLD include those living with diabetes, more often type 2 diabetes (also known as T2D), abnormal levels of blood lipids or high blood pressure.

What are the symptoms of NAFLD?

Many patients will have no symptoms at all.

The main symptoms are:

- tiredness
- liver discomfort.

If you have liver disease and develop any of the following symptoms, seek urgent medical help:

- yellow skin or eyes
- swelling of your stomach
- bruising easily
- vomiting blood
- black/dark tarry faeces
- itchy skin
- episodes of confusion or poor memory.

How is NAFLD treated?

Fortunately, if your NAFLD is linked to your diet or weight, making healthy lifestyle choices can halt the progression of this disease and in some cases, reverse it.

The less damage your liver has, the better chance it has to repair itself. Eating a varied and healthy diet and exercising regularly are key factors to liver recovery and will improve your overall health.

What if I do nothing?

If you have been diagnosed with NAFLD but don't make the necessary changes, this disease can get progressively worse and could lead to established cirrhosis of the liver. This level of damage can lead to liver cancer, liver failure and shorten your life expectancy.

What can I do to help my liver?

If you are overweight, aim to lose weight gradually. In many cases, losing 5-10% of your body weight has been effective in controlling or reversing NAFLD. Losing 0.25 – 1kg (0.5-2 pounds) every week is a safe and reasonable goal. You can calculate your BMI online <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/>

Additional benefits of weight loss include:

- lowered blood pressure
- lowered cholesterol
- improved diabetes control



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Healthy eating

You need to get the right balance of different foods and drinks to help your body work properly and be healthy. Evidence shows us that for most people a well-balanced diet is the best way to stay healthy and manage your weight.

https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Treating-NAFLD_web_JUN21.pdf

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/>



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Exercise

Aim or work up to completing at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise or activity a week. This is the equivalent to 20-30 minutes per day. All forms of exercise can still help improve NAFLD, even if you don't lose weight. Decreasing overall inactive time and breaking up inactive time throughout the day is a useful treatment strategy for all people with NAFLD.

Moderate intensity exercise includes:

- walking
- cycling
- stair climbing
- home workouts
- sitting exercises
- resistance band exercises
- aerobic exercises

Aim for at least 10,000 steps a day, or as many as you can. If you have an iPhone, you can track your steps on the health app or the Pacer Pedometer: Walking Step & Calorie Tracker App is available on iPhone and Android phones.

More info can be found online at:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/free-fitness-ideas/> and

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/get-active-your-way/>



Stop smoking

This can reduce your long-term health risks including lung disease, heart disease and strokes significantly. You can speak with your GP or self-refer for stop smoking support online.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/nhs-stop-smoking-services-help-you-quit/>



Alcohol

Even if your liver disease has not been caused by alcohol, you should still aim to drink less than 14 units of alcohol per week.

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/tools/unit-and-calorie-calculator>



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Example of 14 units per week:

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday



4.4 units

2x pints of 4% beer

Thursday



2.2 units

1x pint of 4% beer

Friday

Saturday



4.5 units

2x 175ml glasses of 13% wine

Sunday



2.2 units

1x pint of 4% beer

Information links to exercise, lifestyle, and dietary advice:

Further information relating to positive lifestyle changes can be found below. You will find website links and QR codes (scan your camera over the QR code) that will take you directly to the relevant website.

Calculate your BMI:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/>



Exercise:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/free-fitness-ideas/>



Sitting Exercises:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/sitting-exercises/>



Dietary Guides

https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Treating-NAFLD_web_JUN21.pdf



<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/>



Resistance band exercises:

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/activity/resistance-bands>



Aerobic exercises:

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/10-minute-home-cardio-workout/>



Smoking:

https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/?WT.mc_





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