



## HOW TO FIX A FATTY LIVER

A fatty liver can arrive like a stealth bomber—without warning pain or nausea to alert you. It has the potential to progress to a more serious chronic liver disease such as cirrhosis, unless you take significant lifestyle action.

### causes

Fatty liver disease is a widespread complaint in Western countries. It affects about one in every 10 people. Its cause is a build-up of fats in the liver, which replace healthy tissue and trigger enlargement of the rest of the liver cells. It is the most common reason for mildly abnormal results on liver-function testing.

Along with heavy alcohol use, which is a well-known risk factor for liver disease, obesity and insulin resistance are the major modern drivers of a fatty liver.

### consequences

Recent research suggests that fatty liver is even more detrimental than visceral adipose tissue—the deep fat that hides in your abdomen and is associated with multiple chronic diseases. Fatty liver increases inflammation in the body, doubles the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and multiplies by four the possibility of metabolic syndrome—a combination of medical issues that increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

### treatment

There is no medication to cure a fatty liver, but it does respond well to lifestyle changes. The following suggestions will help you to avoid or perhaps even reverse a fatty liver problem:

- ▶ If you are overweight, trim down toward the healthy weight range. As little as 5 to 10 per cent loss of your current weight can improve a fatty liver. Very low calorie diets taken for 12 weeks have been shown to shrink a fatty liver in obese people by one third!
- ▶ Walk for one hour each day. This can help your body burn fat, defend the liver against oxidative damage and improve your overall liver health, according to a study from the Cleveland Clinic's Lerner Research Institute.
- ▶ Eat a plant-based diet that's rich in fibre and antioxidants. This will make it easier to lose fat and keep it off in the long term. Scientists believe that adopting an olive oil-rich Mediterranean diet can help to prevent the onset of a fatty liver.

See **page 37** for a “happy liver” meal.

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