

BE WELL

## How to Halt Fatty Liver Disease

By Debbie DeAngelo  
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From our belly to our hips to our upper arms, these are the places that excess fat loves to hang out and taunt us. But did you know that it can accumulate in your liver too?

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is a growing concern, both in our country and worldwide. Further complicating the escalating incidence is its insidious nature. Typically, a silent disease, it can take years for the symptoms to become unveiled. Most often, NAFLD is suspected when routine bloodwork is suggestive of impaired liver function.

This condition literally results from fatty deposits accumulating in the liver and over time damages this vital organ and can lead to chronic liver disease. People who drink too much alcohol may also develop fat and scarring of the liver. However, that condition is different from NAFLD.

As the weight on the national and global scale has skyrocketed, so has liver disease. In fact, being overweight is the number one risk factor. Other indicators for developing this potentially serious disorder include prediabetes or diabetes, high blood pressure, and elevated triglycerides or LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. Based upon your risk factors, family history, and blood work results, your doctor may order imaging studies of the liver, which can reveal fat deposits and scar tissue.

**Feed Your Liver Well**

Whether trying to maintain a healthy liver or trying to slow down and possibly reverse the progression of NAFLD, addressing lifestyle habits is essential – and lifesaving.

**Weigh In.** Since being overweight is the most common cause of this liver disease, gradually shedding a few pounds helps tremendously. It only takes a loss of 7 to 10 percent of your body weight to decrease inflammation and fat deposits in the liver. Eating primarily whole foods and relying less on packaged, prepared, and processed foods is the most effective dietary step in improving every single aspect of your health. Adding more movement to your day goes hand-in-hand with cleaning up your meals.

**Perk Up.** Coffee lovers rejoice! Caffeinated coffee seems to reduce the risk of NAFLD and decrease the likelihood of liver scarring when the disease is present. Most studies show that at least two cups per day are needed. Before you reach for another cup, keep in mind that highly caloric, sugared up specialty coffees don't fit the bill. We can't exclude the teetotalers – research indicates that tea, especially green tea, exhibits the same protective effects but to a somewhat lesser degree.

**Go Green.** A mainstay of the Mediterranean diet, green leafy vegetables are known for their liver supporting nutrients. Leading the pack is dandelion greens, which make a delicious addition to salads or sauteed with cannellini beans for “greens and beans.” Other tasty greens to include in your diet are escarole, Swiss chard, Bok choy, kale, and parsley.

**Cross Yourself.** Literally meaning “cross,” cruciferous vegetables are healing for your entire body, especially the liver. These disease and inflammation extinguishing champions include broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage. The sulforaphane and indole compounds are thought to be responsible for the liver boosting effects. Be sure to eat produce from this category daily.

**Drive by, not thru.** This should come as a surprise to no one. While occasionally indulging in fast food isn't problematic, regularly consuming it is. Popular menu items are high in calories, sugar, saturated fat, and low fiber carbs. Not only is this the recipe for diabetes and a heart attack, but recent evidence revealed that it is linked to fatty liver disease too.

**Tame sweet tooth.** Excess sugar, especially high fructose corn syrup, seems to be harmful to the liver by causing fatty build-up. Some studies indicate that added sugar is as damaging as alcohol. Although sweetened beverages such as pop, sports drinks, and iced tea are culprits, foods like pastries, desserts, and sugar-laden processed foods are equally detrimental. Speaking of alcohol, no safe amount has been established for people living with liver disease or those at high risk of it.

**Choose friendly fats.** We all need fat in our diet, but not the type that comes from french fries and fudge. Besides helping us feel full and satisfied with a meal, fat assists in the absorption of certain vitamins, provides a source of long-term energy, and insulates nerve and brain cells. To decrease liver and overall bodily inflammation, reach for olive oil, avocados, oily fish, and nuts as your main fat sources.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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