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Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease

Overview

What is nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD)?

Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is a buildup of fat in the liver. NAFLD can be harmless, but sometimes it may cause the liver to swell. It is a common condition.

Symptoms

What are the symptoms of NAFLD?

Many people do not have any symptoms. If you have NAFLD, you may feel fullness or pain in the middle or upper right side of the abdomen. You may feel extremely tired (fatigued).

Causes & Risk Factors

What are the risk factors for NAFLD?

A wide range of things can increase your risk of NAFLD, including certain medicines and genetic disorders. The most common risk factors for NAFLD are obesity, diabetes and high cholesterol levels. It is not caused by drinking alcohol.

Diagnosis & Tests

How can my doctor tell if I have NAFLD?

To diagnose NAFLD, your doctor may check your blood and order a scan of your liver. If your doctor thinks you may have a more severe liver disease, you may need a liver biopsy. In this procedure, your doctor inserts a needle through your skin and removes a small piece of tissue from your liver. This tissue is looked at under a microscope to check for signs of severe liver disease.

Treatment

How is NAFLD treated?

People who have NAFLD usually do not need treatment. The most important thing is to focus on what has caused your NAFLD. Losing weight gradually (1 to 2 pounds per week) may reduce the amount of fat in your liver. However, losing weight quickly may make NAFLD worse. Ask your doctor for advice on how to lose weight in a safe and healthy way. If your cholesterol and blood sugar levels are high, your doctor may give you medicine to lower them. If a medicine you take is causing your NAFLD, your doctor may consider switching you to a different medicine.

Complications

What can I expect?

For most people, NAFLD is harmless and does not cause serious health problems. NAFLD usually does not affect how well the liver works. However, in rare cases, NAFLD may stop the liver from working as it should. Although no one can tell for sure who will have liver problems from NAFLD, it is more likely to happen in people who have diabetes or who are very overweight.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What is the best treatment for me?
- What complications can I expect?
- What changes should I make to my diet?
- What exercises are good for me?
- Are there any medicines I should take?
- Will I have any liver damage?
- How quickly should I lose weight?
- What is causing my nonalcoholic fatty liver disease?
- Should I stop drinking alcohol?
- Are there any medicines I should avoid taking?

Source

Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease by M Bayard, J Holt, E Boroughs (*American Family Physician* June 01, 2006, <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20060601/1961.html>)

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