



Fatty Liver Disease

It has been suggested on an abdominal ultrasound that you have fatty liver disease. This informational handout is being given to you to help you understand your diagnosis.

What is Fatty Liver Disease?

Fatty liver disease is a very complex and detailed process, but to put it simply: Fatty liver disease occurs when the cells of the liver begin to absorb fat that is not normally absorbed. The liver cells do not function appropriately when they absorb this additional fat, which may eventually lead to failure of the liver.

Who gets fatty liver disease?

- Some individuals are genetically predisposed to develop fatty liver.
- Most commonly, individuals with insulin resistance develop the disease.
- Nearly 10-25% of the adult population develops some form of fatty liver disease.
- The number of obese (overweight) individuals who develop the disease is as high as 50%.
- Alcohol consumption can cause fatty liver in individuals who drink as little as two beers, 8 ounces of wine, or 3 ounces of hard liquor on a regular basis.
- Individuals who have viruses that affect the liver (specifically Hepatitis) develop more severe cases of fatty liver.

How would I have known that I had fatty liver?

Often, fatty liver has no symptoms, and the only sign will be elevated liver enzymes on a blood sample, or an abnormal abdominal ultrasound ordered by your provider. However, some individuals may experience pain in the upper right side of their abdomen; just below or behind their rib cage.

How important is the liver? Can I live without it?

The liver is very important to your health, and in fact, you can't live without it!

The liver is required to function correctly for many important processes! Your liver produces bile, removes damaged red blood cells, breaks down insulin, converts and releases sugars, makes cholesterol, breaks down toxic substances, and stores iron, B12, copper and glycogen. The processes of the liver are so numerous and so involved, if we listed them all, we'd fill up an entire text book chock full of detailed information.

Let's keep it simple: Your liver is very important to you living a healthy life. Your liver takes care of you, so you should take care of it!!

What should I do to get better?

First and foremost, you should stop drinking alcohol altogether. If you have been drinking regular amounts of alcohol, you may need to enter rehabilitation to prevent significant withdrawal symptoms.

Lose weight. Your BMI is _____. You should aim for a BMI of 25. For you, this would be a weight of _____. You could reach this goal, by losing 2 pounds weekly, by _____.

The best way to lose weight is to eat 5-6 small meals daily, each consisting of at least 200 calories, but not exceeding 350 calories per small meal.

- Eat a low fat diet, with plenty of carbohydrates and protein to fuel your muscles.
- Drink plenty of fluid (water) without caffeine.
- Find ways to increase your activity level each day, by moving your body in new ways.

If you need additional information about losing weight, join a weight loss group such as weight watchers (which has an incredible success rate). Darien Women's Health also offers guided weight loss. Ask for more information if you desire.

DO NOT try gimmick weight loss remedies. Gimmicks tend to cause yo-yo losses and gains and they rarely help you lose weight on a long term basis. Do not take ANY weight loss supplements unless you know that they are 100% safe on the liver; this means do not take ANY weight loss supplements! They don't work; and in fact, can harm you.

Treat your high cholesterol. If you have cholesterol greater than 200, or if your LDL is greater than 120, talk to your provider about getting help to lower your cholesterol.

Treat your insulin resistance. Ask for a test to determine if you have been resistant to the insulin that your body makes. There are medicines and diets that can help your body get better.

Take an antioxidant supplement. Antioxidants have been shown to help prevent the oxidative damage that occurs in some individuals who have fatty liver. Vitamins C and E are known to be helpful. Never take more E than a bottle tells you to take. You CAN have too much E.

Are there additional tests that need to be ran?

It will be important to obtain samples of blood that will measure your liver enzymes. We will be watching levels of ALT and AST. If your ALT/AST ratio becomes greater than 1.0, and you are older than 45 years old, you will be sent to a specialist who will determine if you should have a liver biopsy.

Your cholesterol levels (your total cholesterol, HDL, LDL, and triglycerides) will be checked periodically, depending on whether or not they have been abnormal in the past.

Your levels of insulin resistance will be checked periodically, depending on whether or not they have been abnormal in the past.

Is there anything else I should report to my provider?

Be sure to let your provider know if you have any of the following symptoms, either today, or in the future during follow up visits: Yellow discoloration of the skin or “whites of your eyes”, itching of the skin, pain in the belly, swelling of the belly, or change in mental ability.

The good news is...

Only ¼ of the people who have fatty liver disease ever progress to developing liver damage. This means that if you follow the advise that has been given to you, and change some particular aspects of your lifestyle, that you will continue living a healthy life with a liver that works as it should!