

# Your Pathway for Managing Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (adults)

## What is NAFLD?

- A build-up of fat within the liver that can lead to liver damage.
- Often occurs with obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol.
- The most common liver disease in Canada and occurs in up to 25% of the population.
- Usually cared for by healthcare providers in your family doctor's office.

## What is the NAFLD patient pathway?

It is a map for you and your healthcare provider(s) to follow. It makes sure the care you are getting for NAFLD is safe and helpful in managing your symptoms.

You and your healthcare providers may modify the pathway to best suit your healthcare needs.

If your NAFLD cannot be managed over time, you and your healthcare providers may decide a referral to a specialist would be helpful.

### 1. Findings of possible liver problems suggesting NAFLD

- Abnormal bloodwork or liver test results
- Fatty liver seen on an ultrasound

### 2. Explore possible causes of liver problems other than NAFLD

- Review all medicines, herbals, and supplements you are taking
- Review your use of alcohol
- Make the changes recommended by your healthcare providers, then your liver tests will be repeated

### 3. Tests that may be done

- Blood tests to check for other causes of liver disease
- Blood tests to check for other conditions that can be associated with NAFLD (e.g. diabetes)

### 4. Assess risk of severe liver damage (scarring of the liver)

- Based on your blood test results
- If higher risk, you may be referred to a specialist for further assessment
- If lower risk, you and your healthcare providers will work together to reduce your risks of liver damage and other health problems

Most people with NAFLD do not develop severe liver damage.

Ongoing monitoring is important because NAFLD can cause serious health problems in some people.

If you are concerned about your liver health, ask your primary care provider.

Once you find something that works for you, stick with it.

You may need to keep trying other options to find what works best to manage your symptoms.



### 5. Reduce your health risks (see over for details)

- Exercise
- Make changes to your diet
- Lose weight, if you need to
- Limit alcohol use
- Complete screening for heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol, and treat, as required
- Redo blood tests every 2-3 years to monitor risk for severe liver damage



# What do I need to know about Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease?

## Working through the NAFLD patient pathway can take several months or be ongoing for years:

- Your healthcare providers will ask you questions about your health, review medicines and other products you are taking, and ask about your alcohol use.
- They may suggest certain tests to look for other causes of liver disease and use blood tests to check your risk of having severe liver damage.
- If you are at higher risk, you may be referred to a specialist for further assessment.
- If you are at lower risk, you and your healthcare providers will make a plan to reduce your risk and improve your health.
- This plan will address your liver health and other health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and heart disease risk that may occur at the same time.
- Your healthcare providers will recheck your blood tests every 2-3 years to monitor your risk of severe liver damage.

## To manage your condition, try to:

- Get at least 20 minutes of physical activity daily. Aim for 150 minutes each week (e.g. walking, biking, gardening, stairs, your favourite sports).
- Improve your diet. Choose more high-fibre carbohydrates, less refined starches, and less added sugars. Avoid saturated fats. Choose lean meats and plant-based proteins.
- Lose weight, if you need to. Losing just 3-5 kg (7-11 lbs) can help.
- Limit alcohol use to no more than 4-5 drinks/week for men and 3-4 drinks/week for women.
- Drinking up to 2-3 cups of coffee/day may be helpful.

## Seeing a specialist is only recommended if:

- Your blood tests suggest you have a higher risk of severe liver damage.
- You and your healthcare providers identify concerning symptoms or test results.

## You can find more information in these great resources:


- Canadian Liver Foundation [liver.ca](http://liver.ca)
- Nutrition Education Materials [ahs.ca/NutritionResources](http://ahs.ca/NutritionResources)
- Alberta Healthy Living Program [ahs.ca/info/page13984.aspx](http://ahs.ca/info/page13984.aspx)
  - workshops on weight management

## Write any notes or questions you may have here:

Please provide feedback about this patient pathway by completing a short [survey](https://bit.ly/DHSCNsurvey) (bit.ly/DHSCNsurvey) or email us at [Digestivehealth.SCN@ahs.ca](mailto:Digestivehealth.SCN@ahs.ca)



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