

## Patient information

### Non Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease

Nutrition and Dietetics Department

#### **What is non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD)?**

A healthy liver should contain little or no fat. In some people, fat can build up in the liver over time and they may be diagnosed with NAFLD (this may also be termed MASLD or Metabolic Associated Dysfunction Associated Liver Disease).

#### **You are more likely to develop NAFLD if you:**

- are overweight or obese.
- eat an unhealthy diet a lot of the time.
- have high cholesterol or Type 2 Diabetes.
- are insulin resistant e.g., if you have polycystic ovarian syndrome.

Early-stage NAFLD (sometimes called 'fatty liver') may only be identified in routine bloods tests but if untreated, it can lead to serious liver damage including fibrosis or cirrhosis which can cause your liver to stop working well. If detected and managed at an early stage, it's possible to reduce the amount of fat in your liver and stop NAFLD getting worse. If you require additional information about your NAFLD you can contact your Hepatology Specialist Nurse.

#### **What is the treatment for NAFLD?**

The best-known treatment for NAFLD is to achieve a healthy body weight and exercise regularly. If your NAFLD is linked to being overweight, there is good evidence that gradual weight loss and increased exercise can reduce the amount of fat in your liver.

If you are overweight, speak to your doctor about losing weight safely. Avoid 'crash diets' and very rapid weight loss as these rarely work and you are unlikely to maintain weight loss long term. Losing half a pound to two pounds per week (0.2 – 1kg) is a safe and realistic target.

Your GP surgery may refer you to local weight loss groups such as Slimming World. These could be provided by the NHS or may be commercial services that you pay for. You may also be referred to a dietitian.

If you are not overweight, following a healthy and well balanced diet will help to maintain your weight and general health.

Keeping good control of any existing health conditions, such as diabetes, thyroid problems, obesity, hypertension, and high cholesterol is also important.

## What is healthy eating?

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is one of the most important things you can do to keep yourself well and reduce fatty deposits in your liver. The blood fats associated with NAFLD (triglycerides and cholesterol) are partly absorbed from your food intake so what you eat is important.

Regular, well balanced meals containing protein (such as beans and pulses, fish and lean meat), starchy carbohydrates (such as potatoes, bread or rice) and fruit and vegetables are the best approach.

### Tips to help you:

- Aim for at least five portions a day of fruit and vegetables: aiming for a variety of colours. One portion is about a handful one medium apple or pear, three tablespoons of peas, sweetcorn or carrots or two satsumas.
- Choose high-fibre foods such as brown rice, wholemeal bread, and pasta which keep you fuller for longer and can help blood glucose and cholesterol levels.
- Reduce intake of processed foods such as ready meals and takeaways.
- Limit foods and drinks that contain large amounts of added sugars such as fizzy drinks, sweets and cakes.
- Limit foods high in saturated fats such as cheese, cream and processed meat. Try to replace with reduced fat version, leaner meats and fish.
- Reduce snacks between meals, especially those high in fat, salt, or sugar – try alternative snacks such as fruit, low fat yoghurt, rice cakes with cottage cheese or breadsticks and hummus.
- Limit how much salt you add when cooking or at the table – try other flavours such as pepper, herbs and spices.
- Replace meats with plant-based proteins on some days of the week – try meals containing beans, pulses, Quorn™ or tofu instead possible.
- Limit frying food – try to grill or oven bake instead.

On the next page is the Eatwell Guide. This shows how much of what we eat overall should come from each of the food groups to achieve a 'healthy balanced diet'. You do not need to get this balance exactly right at every meal, instead aim to get the balance right over a day or even a week.

# Eatwell Guide

Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.

Check the label on packaged foods

Each serving (150g) contains		
Energy	1046kJ / 250kcal	
Fat	3.0g	
Saturated	1.3g	
Sugars	34g	
Salt	0.9g	
LOW	MED	HIGH
4%	7%	33%
13%		15%

Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kJ / 167kcal of an adult's reference intake

Choose foods lower in fat, salt and sugars

**Fruit and vegetables**  
Eat at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day

**Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins**  
Eat more beans and pulses, 2 portions of sustainably sourced fish per week, one of which is oily. Eat less red and processed meat

**Oil & spreads**  
Choose unsaturated oils and use in small amounts

**Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates**  
Choose wholegrain or higher fibre versions with less added fat, salt and sugar

**Dairy and alternatives**  
Choose lower fat and lower sugar options

**Water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee all count.**  
Limit fruit juice and/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day.

6-8 a day

Per day 2000kcal 2500kcal = ALL FOOD + ALL DRINKS

Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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## **What about alcohol?**

Alcohol can accelerate liver damage and provides excess calories which can lead to weight gain. If you choose to drink alcohol, stay within the NHS guidelines - 14 units per week is the recommended level for adults in the UK; these should be spread throughout the week:

One unit

= Half a pint standard strength beer or larger.

= a single (25ml) measure of spirits.

= a small (125ml) glass of wine.

Depending on the severity of your NAFL, your doctor may advise you to avoid alcohol altogether.

## **NHS weight loss plan**

This is a free 12-week diet and exercise plan from the NHS which promotes safe and sustainable weight loss.

### **Following this plan will assist you with:**

- learning how to make healthier food choices.
- accessing support from our online community.
- recording a weekly progress chart.
- accessing exercise plans.
- learning skills to prevent weight regain.

To access the weight loss plan online go to:

**<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/start-the-nhs-weight-loss-plan>**

### **How much exercise do I need to do?**

There is good evidence that increased exercise can reduce the amount of fat in your liver.

Exercise will also help you to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

The Department of Health recommends adults should aim for 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity (such as walking quickly or cycling) per week i.e. 30 minutes on at least five days a week.

You should also undertake physical activity to improve muscle strength on at least two days a week. Try to minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (sitting) for extended periods. Find an exercise that you enjoy – for example walking a dog, playing a sport with friends or dancing.

If you have any health concerns about beginning an exercise regime, make an appointment to see your GP and discuss it with them first.

## Goal Setting

We know making changes to your diet and lifestyle can be difficult and overwhelming. It is often a good approach to make little changes at one time to ensure you can incorporate these into your lifestyle and that the changes are sustainable.

- Aim for one to two small changes at a time.
- Prioritise changes which are more important to you.

Once small changes have been incorporated and sustained in your lifestyle, you may feel that you can add another change.

Speak to your GP practice for more information on local resources available to support you.

## Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

## Further information

**If you are concerned that you are losing weight or feel that you need to speak to a dietitian, please contact the nutrition and dietetics department.**

### Dietitians

**Aintree Hospital**

**Tel: 0151 529 3473**

**Royal Liverpool Hospital**

**Tel: 0151 706 2120**

### Dietary information

**For recipes and meal ideas visit Change 4 Life**

**<https://www.nhs.uk/change4life/recipes>**

**British Dietetic Association (BDA) Food Fact sheets can be accessed online:**

1. Portion size [https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/portion\\_sizes](https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/portion_sizes).
2. Plant based diets [https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/plant-based\\_diet](https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/plant-based_diet).
3. How to get 5 A Day  
[https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/fruit\\_vegetables\\_\\_how\\_get\\_five-a-day](https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/fruit_vegetables__how_get_five-a-day).

**British Liver Trust:**

**<https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/liver-conditions/non-alcohol-related-fatty-liver-disease/>.**

**Drink Aware**

**<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>.**

**Exercise**

**NHS benefits of exercise and how to get started: Exercise - NHS (www.nhs.uk).**

**NHS Couch to 5K: Couch to 5K is a running plan for absolute beginners using weekly podcasts. It will help you gradually work up towards running 5K in just nine weeks. The program starts with a mix of running and walking to build up your fitness and stamina. Couch to 5K is a free and easy way of getting fitter and healthier.**

**To access the Couch to 5K plan go to: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/get-running-with-couch-to-5k/#how-do-i-get-started>.**

**NHS Strength and Flex Exercise Plan: The 5-week plan consists of a series of equipment-free, easy to follow exercises designed to improve your strength and flexibility. This can be done from the comfort of your own home using how-to video clips for a full body workout.**

**To access the Strength and Flex plan go to: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/strength-and-flex-exercise-plan/>.**

**Author: Nutrition and Dietetics Department**

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All Trust approved information is available on request in alternative formats, including other languages, easy read, large print, audio, Braille, moon and electronically.

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