

ANTHC Liver Disease and Hepatitis Program Summer 2024 Newsletter

All About Fat in the Liver:

It is normal for the liver to contain some fat; however too much fat in the liver can be dangerous. Metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) occurs when too much fat is stored in liver cells. It is the most common cause of chronic liver disease in the US. MASLD was formerly called non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) or metabolic associated fatty liver disease (MAFLD). The name was changed all across the world to remove stigmatizing language (like *fat* and *non-alcoholic*). The new name describes what the disease is rather than focusing on what it *is not*.

MASLD includes all patients who have hepatic steatosis (fat in the liver) and have at least one component of metabolic syndrome:

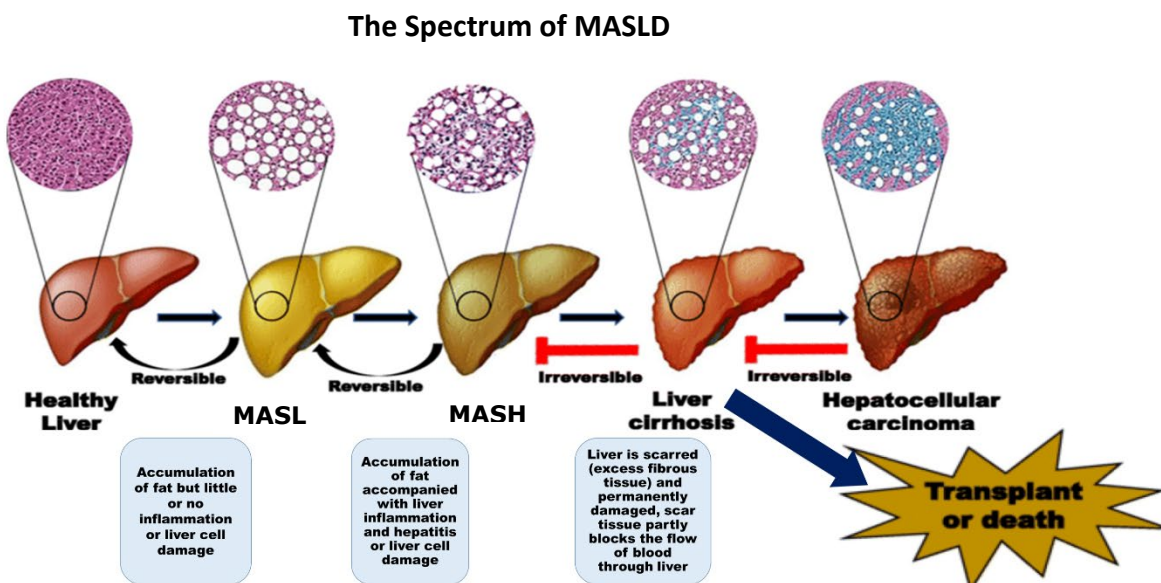
- obesity
- high blood pressure
- high blood triglycerides
- low levels of HDL cholesterol
- diabetes/insulin resistance

In the U.S., about 30% of the population has MASLD. About 20% of people with MASLD develop liver inflammation, also called metabolic dysfunction-associated steatohepatitis (MASH). MASH is a leading cause of cirrhosis, which can lead to liver failure or liver cancer. MASH was formerly called non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH).

Metabolic-Alcohol Associated Liver Disease (Met-ALD) is MASLD along with regular alcohol intake of 1 to 3 drinks/day for women and 2 to 4 drinks/day for men. Met-ALD recognizes that there can be more than one cause of liver disease in a patient. For persons who drink more alcohol than noted above, liver disease is considered alcohol-associated liver disease (ALD).

Research Findings:

About one quarter of patients seen at the ANTHC liver specialty clinic have been diagnosed with MASLD and about 10% of liver clinic patients have MASH.



In our analysis, liver stiffness measurements and liver function lab tests indicated that Alaska Native/American Indian Persons (AN/AI) with MASH are at higher risk for cirrhosis and liver failure than AN/AI patients with MASLD that has not yet progressed to MASH. More than a third of AN/AI patients who were referred to the ANTHC liver specialty clinic for MASLD were diagnosed with MASH. These findings suggest a need for better screening of patients at high risk for MASLD to identify those with MASH earlier when progression can be slowed or reversed with changes in diet and exercise. One medication has been FDA approved for the treatment of MASH in patients with moderate to advanced scarring (F2 to F3 fibrosis). It is called resmetirom (Rezdiffra®). Studies of other medications are ongoing.

Clinician's Corner: What you can do about fat in the liver

Getting a diagnosis of MASLD may come as a surprise. Just know that you are not alone... since nearly 1 in 3 people in the U.S. has it. Here are some helpful tips we have put together so that you can focus on healthy lifestyle choices:

- There is no SINGLE diet that you should follow for MASLD. It is more important to eat a variety of healthy foods, including vegetables and fruits, whole grains, fish and other lean proteins, and healthy oils such as olive, avocado, and grapeseed oil. Avoid processed foods.
- Eat traditional foods from the land and sea when possible.
- Drink water throughout the day and listen to your body when it signals it is thirsty - dry mouth, headache, and dark yellow urine.
- Get at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week or 30 minutes per day: brisk walk or hike, riding bike, dancing, pushing a lawn mower, rollerblading.
- Avoid eating 3 hours before bedtime. If you must have a snack before bed, choose a healthy snack like vegetables, dried fish, boiled egg, apple with a tablespoon of peanut butter, a small handful of nuts, plain or low sugar yogurt.
- Drink coffee black – 3 cups/day of regular or decaffeinated coffee may help prevent liver fibrosis and liver cancer.
- Avoid drinking sodas, juice, energy drinks and alcoholic beverages. These types of beverages often have a lot of added sugar and calories and few healthy nutrients.
- Have an exercise partner – to make exercising more fun and more likely, that you will do it.
- Eat a variety of healthy foods to create a healthier environment in your gut or digestive tract. This is important for keeping your liver, brain, and immune system healthy!
- Stay up to date about MASLD and learn more about healthy nutrition and lifestyle habits at trusted websites, such as: American Liver Foundation: www.liverfoundation.org or Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: <https://www.eatright.org/>

COBRE NAFLD/HCV study:

The Liver Disease and Hepatitis Program has received funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for a study to learn more about MASLD and hepatitis C among AN people. We want to find out if there are differences between AN people with MASLD and hepatitis C compared to those with MASLD alone. Possible differences include symptoms or liver-related outcomes such as liver cancer and liver failure. There may also be differences in fibrosis stage and disease progression. We will start recruiting for this study later this summer. We may ask you to join the study the next time we see you in clinic.

If you have any questions about your liver, please contact a nurse at the **Liver Clinic** at **907-729-1560**.