When Fat Hijacks the Liver

March 18, 2019 By Lucinda K. Porter RN

You'd think that I wouldn't have to worry about my liver now that I don't have hepatitis C anymore. I don't drink alcohol, so that is a huge liver saver. However, I'd be foolish to ignore the most common liver disease there is: non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD).

NAFLD isn't caused by a virus. However, I could easily acquire it if I ignored all the health risk warnings cautioning us against overeating, drinking sugary drinks, and leading a sedentary life. NAFLD is caused by excess fat in the liver. If fat accumulation has caused inflammation or damage to liver cells, the condition is called non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH). Over time, cirrhosis may develop, which can lead to liver cancer or liver failure.

NAFLD often occurs without symptoms and has risen to the most common liver disease in the United States. The threat of NAFLD, diabetes, heart disease, stroke and Alzheimer's are what propel me to exercise on most days. Fortunately exercise helps to prevent all of these and I don't need five different types of exercise in order to avoid these.

NASH is the more severe form of fatty liver disease. A recent study estimated that there are 6.65 million adults with NASH in the United States. Using a model to estimate the total economic burden of NASH, researchers reported lifetime costs of all NASH patients living in this country in 2017 will be $222.6 billion; the cost of the advanced NASH population will be $95.4 billion. Source: Burden of Illness and Economic Model for Patients With Nonalcoholic Steatohepatitis in the United States Zobair M. Younossi, et al. Hepatology February 2019 pps 564-572

NAFLD and NASH are completely preventable. Click here to read about these and what you can do to prevent and or manage these serious conditions.

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