

MASLD: a quick guide for adults

MASLD, NAFLD and fatty liver disease are different names for the same condition.

What is MASLD?

Metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) happens when too much fat builds up in the liver. It is a long-term (chronic) liver disease, which means it develops slowly and may get worse over time.

MASLD is often linked to conditions like obesity, type 2 diabetes and heart disease. These are sometimes called metabolic conditions.

Your liver is not meant to store extra fat. When fat builds up in the liver, it can cause inflammation (irritation and swelling).

Over time, this damages liver cells. In some people, it can progress to a more serious stage where scarring (fibrosis) builds up in the liver. In a small number of people, it can lead to cirrhosis, liver failure or liver cancer.



**MASLD is very common.
About 1 in 4 people in the UK have it.**

What are the symptoms of MASLD?

Most people with MASLD don't have any symptoms in the early stages.

In fact, it's common for people to have it for years without noticing any signs. Symptoms usually only appear after the liver has already been damaged.



Liver UK is the new name
for the British Liver Trust
and Children's Liver
Disease Foundation

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How is MASLD diagnosed?

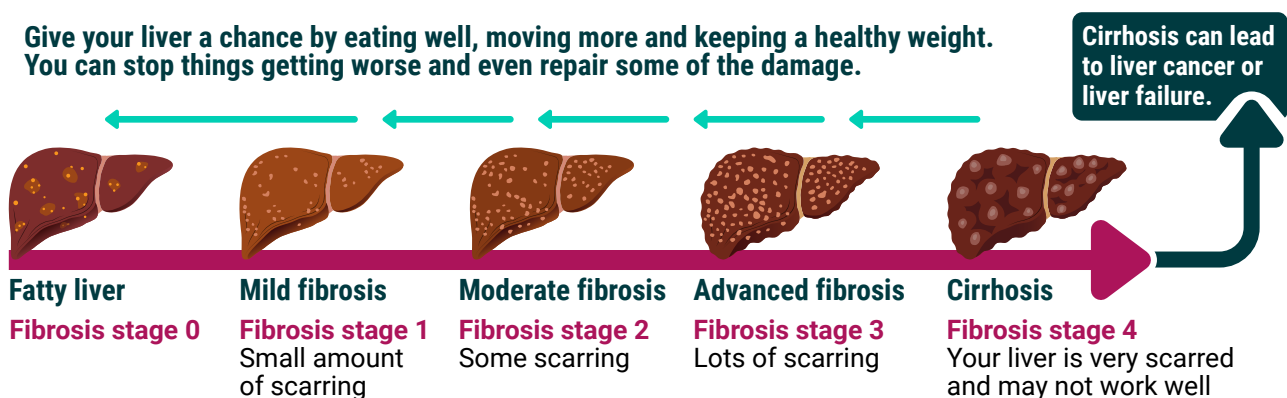
There isn't one simple test that can diagnose MASLD. This can make it difficult for doctors to spot. Some people only find out they have MASLD during health checks or tests for another health problem. Sometimes it is diagnosed later, when MASLD has become more advanced.

If your doctor thinks you might have liver disease, they will use a range of examinations and tests. This will usually include a full medical history, physical examination and liver blood tests. Doctors often use scoring systems that combine results from several blood tests.

If your results suggest an unclear result or a higher risk, your doctor may refer you for extra tests. This could include transient elastography (FibroScan) and liver biopsy. These tests check for scarring (fibrosis) in your liver, which is the main sign of how advanced your liver disease is.

What are the different stages of MASLD?

MASLD has several different stages. Doctors check for liver scarring (fibrosis) to work out the stage of the disease. Having one stage does not mean you will always move to the next one. It is possible to slow or even reverse the damage, especially if it is at an early stage.



Doctors cannot predict whose MASLD will get worse (progress) over time. For most people, it takes many years or even decades. But in some people, it can happen more quickly.

People with obesity or type 2 diabetes have a higher risk of developing serious liver disease.

What happens if I am diagnosed with MASLD?

Getting a MASLD diagnosis can be worrying. You might wonder what it means and what comes next. Knowing how your care will be managed can help you feel more in control. The support and treatment you receive will depend on the stage of your condition.

Diagnosed with earlier stage MASLD (fibrosis stage 0, stage 1, or stage 2)

If MASLD is found early, your local GP will manage your care. They will talk with you about your weight, diet, and activity levels. By making some changes to your everyday life, you can repair any damage and reverse your MASLD.

You should have tests **every 3-5 years** to check for more serious liver scarring (advanced fibrosis).

Diagnosed with later stage MASLD (fibrosis stage 3 or stage 4)

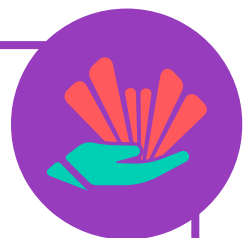
If your MASLD has reached a later stage, you may be referred to hospital for further treatment or monitoring. At this stage, your liver has more scarring (fibrosis). This increases the risk of serious problems, such as cirrhosis, liver failure or liver cancer. But it is still possible to stop more damage if you make changes to your everyday life. They may also reverse some of the liver damage. If you have cirrhosis (fibrosis stage 4), there is permanent scarring (fibrosis) of the liver due to long-term damage. Your doctor will discuss any additional treatments you may need. These can help prevent or manage complications linked with cirrhosis.

You should also be offered a scan **every 6 months** to check for signs of liver cancer.

How we can help

The Liver UK support team are here for you and for your family and friends. Find out more more at **liveruk.org/support**

Call our nurse-led helpline to talk to one of our team: **0800 652 7330**



How is MASLD treated?

Treatment for MASLD has two main aims:

- To stop the condition getting worse, so it doesn't lead to serious problems such as cirrhosis, liver failure or liver cancer.
- To help your liver repair as much damage as possible.

Your treatment plan will depend on how serious your MASLD is and if there is scarring (fibrosis) in your liver. For most people, the main treatments are:

Keeping a healthy weight or losing weight (if needed)

If you have MASLD and are at a healthy weight, it's important to avoid gaining weight. Extra weight can make your MASLD worse. If you are overweight, losing 5% to 10% of your body weight can control and, in some cases, reverse MASLD. Losing weight isn't easy, so you don't have to do it alone. Talk to your doctor about getting support with weight loss.

Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet

There isn't a special diet that cures MASLD. Most people benefit from eating a healthy, well-balanced diet. Aim to eat and drink healthily most of the time, without having too much or too little of any one thing. You can ask to be referred to a registered NHS dietitian. They can help you make realistic, long-term changes.

Being more physically active

Being more physically active is one of the best ways to reduce liver fat and improve MASLD. Aim for at least 2½ hours (150 minutes) of moderate intensity activity each week. Brisk walking, team sports, swimming and dancing all count. It's also important to do activities that strengthen your muscles twice a week. This could include lifting weights, using resistance bands or carrying heavy shopping.

Don't worry if you can't reach the target at first. Start small and build up the amount you do over time. Talk to your doctor or healthcare professional if you need help getting started.

You can find out more about treating MASLD with a healthy diet and physical activity on our website.

Medicines

Currently, there are no specific medicines available in the UK to treat MASLD. But your doctor may recommend treatments for related conditions, such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Treating these conditions is important because they can impact your overall health.

Treatments for MASLD are changing quickly. Visit our website for information about the latest treatments for MASLD.

Treatments for advanced liver disease

If you are diagnosed with stage 3 or 4 liver fibrosis, it means there is a lot of scarring in your liver. Your doctor will still talk to you about steps you can take to support your health. This could include eating a healthy diet, staying active, and keeping a healthy weight. However, you may also need additional treatments to help manage symptoms and complications linked to cirrhosis. This could include medicines or medical procedures to help manage symptoms and prevent further liver damage.

Other useful websites

NHS Better Health: [nhs.uk/better-health](https://www.nhs.uk/better-health)

British Dietetic Association (BDA): [bda.uk.com](https://www.bda.uk.com)

Sport England: [sportengland.org](https://www.sportengland.org)

**We have lots of information about MASLD.
To find out more, scan the QR code or visit
liveruk.org/masld**



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