Q&A: Am I at risk for fatty liver disease?

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A: Fatty liver disease is the most common liver disease in the world, and it affects 30 percent to 40 percent of adults in the United States. According to the American Liver Foundation.
While many people are not familiar with the disease, fatty liver is a national health problem that continues to grow every day.

It is a silent disease, often showing delayed signs or symptoms. One of the main diseases associated with fatty liver is hypertension. Decreased liver function may put excess stress on your heart, which can lead to a heart attack or a stroke. If untreated, fatty liver disease can cause cirrhosis — scarring of the liver tissue — which can eventually lead to liver cancer or end-stage liver failure.

Common risk factors for developing fatty liver disease are obesity, high tryglicerides and diabetes. Fatty liver is commonly associated with poor diet, excessive alcohol use, and sedentary lifestyles. Fatigue and pain in the upper right abdomen are prevalent symptoms when the liver is inflamed, and it can take several years to show these signs.

If you have fatty liver disease or are at risk, medication can help manage the disease. Your physician may recommend frequent monitoring of your liver health, specifically through abdominal ultrasounds or other methods such as FibroScan, a non-surgical diagnostic device used to perform tests to measure liver scarring or “fibrosis.”

The best way to prevent fatty liver is to make positive lifestyle changes:

- Engage in 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise a day.
- Eat a healthy diet and limit your consumption of fructose; fructose is a type of sugar that easily transforms into fat and can accumulate in the liver.

Additionally, losing at least 7 percent of total body weight can dramatically assist in managing or treating the disease.

Talk to your physician about your risk factors for fatty liver disease and any appropriate lifestyle modifications.

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