Fatty liver: Ways to treat this alarming problem

DT Next · 28 Jun 2024 · 4

Fatty liver is one of the globally increasing and highly alarming liver problems. Previously, non-alcoholic fatty liver was a major health problem in developed nations. But in recent days, even in developing countries like India, the trend of fatty liver is on the rise, secondary to the rise in the obesity epidemic. The impact of the fatty liver does not stop there, also fatty liver-related liver cancer and the need for liver transplantation are on the rise. By 2040, the projected population with fatty liver might increase to almost double the current prevalence numbers.

Who is prone to develop fatty liver?

The fatty liver is commonly identified among individuals with underlying diabetes (high blood sugars), high blood cholesterol levels, obesity (Body Mass Index BMI >30), sedentary lifestyle, and excessive junk food consumption. Recently proposed risk factors include high blood pressure, pre-diabetes and high Hs-CRP levels in blood.

MAFLD -- new name to an old foe With all these advancements in research, the name non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) has been switched over to "Metabolic Associated
Fatty Liver Disease (MAFLD)", for a better understanding of the disease by the public and its prevention. It is more common among middle-aged individuals (40-60 years of age), although a recent increase has been noted among the adolescent population. Fatty liver does not produce any symptoms in the early stages and is mainly diagnosed on screening ultrasound scan.

Should all fatty liver be treated?

The treatment of fatty liver is mainly focused on lifestyle modification, weight reduction, healthy dietary habits, and good diabetic control. Having a healthy balanced diet with low fat/ sugars and avoiding excessive sweets, foods rich in bad cholesterol, and junk food will improve liver health. Regular walking, aerobic exercises 3 to 4 times/week, and weight reduction for obese/ overweight persons play a major part in the reversal of fatty liver to normal.

When to meet a liver specialist?

All patients with the above-mentioned risks should get tested for their liver health. Only a minor proportion of patients might require medicines and most persons with fatty liver are manageable with modification of risk elements.