- Liver



Love your Liver

Sarah Di Lorenzo, clinical nutritionist and author of the new book *The Liver Repair Plan*, explains why the liver is so crucial to your health and how you can support it.

The core of maintaining a healthy liver is what we eat. So many foods contain compounds that improve our liver enzymes, lower inflammation and oxidative stress, are full of antioxidants, and can help protect the liver from fat build-up.

The liver does so much for us, so giving it the right fuel helps it perform optimally. One of the many reasons I wanted to write this book was to show people how to eat well for their liver health so they can benefit from all the functions that the liver performs.

When your liver isn't healthy, you won't metabolise food as well; when you're needing energy, your energy conversion will be poor; when you're trying to sleep, you'll struggle. Plus, your liver won't detox, nutrients won't be processed and metabolism won't be regulated as well.

In the clinic, I see so many people struggling to reach their health goals even when following a program diligently. Looking at their blood tests, in most cases their liver enzymes were elevated, so they were starting their health journey way behind the start line. Once your liver repairs, you'll start seeing the results. Perseverance and consistency are key.

The liver works hard at producing proteins, cholesterol and bile; storing vitamins, minerals and carbohydrates; and breaking down alcohol and medications. Not only will eating the right foods improve all these functions, but it'll also lower your risk of disease.

The food you eat is like fuel – the liver is processing, filtering, detoxing and producing from that fuel. You decide which fuel to use. Your liver is in your hands, so pick fuel that you'll get the best results from. Otherwise, like a car with the wrong fuel, your liver will break down.

Think of your liver's potential to come back to working at full capacity. Let your liver work its magic in sorting out what is bad and what is good for you, and knowing the difference between what is toxic and what is nutritious. ►

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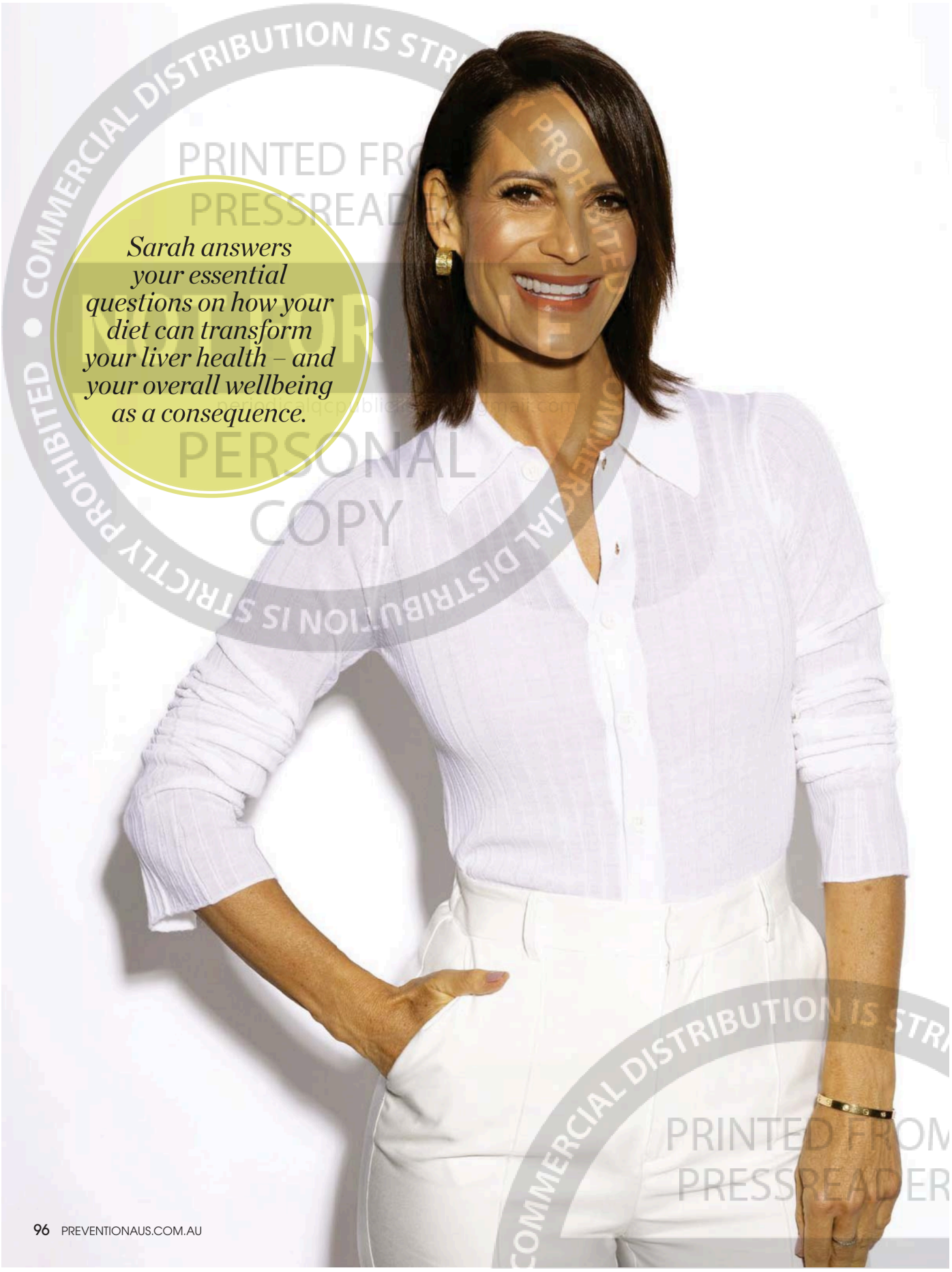

Sarah answers your essential questions on how your diet can transform your liver health – and your overall wellbeing as a consequence.

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1 What are the most important foods you recommend including daily to support liver repair and function?

What you eat is so important for the health of your liver. What was once called NAFLD or non-alcoholic fatty liver disease is now called MASLD or metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease, which is liver disease related to a poor diet leading to a fatty liver. The core of good liver health is maintaining a healthy diet, eating foods that will keep inflammation low, are full of antioxidants and will help prevent fat build-up.

These foods include **AVOCADOS**, as they are full of fibre, as well as anti-inflammatory. Aim to eat one quarter daily. Also great for liver health are **APPLES** for the fibre, **ARTICHOKES** for the phytochemical compounds, and **ASPARAGUS** for bile production and anti-inflammatory properties. **BANANAS** are excellent for their resistant starch, and **BEETROOT** for the compound betalain, which supports detoxification. **BERRIES** are great for their antioxidants, and **CARROTS** for energy. **CELERY** is terrific for detox support, and **CHIA SEEDS** are good for their fibre. **CHILLI** boosts blood flow, and **CRUCIFEROUS VEGETABLES** support detox pathways. **CUCUMBERS** lower inflammation, and **DATES** have fibre and potassium. **EGGPLANTS** help with detoxing, and **FATTY FISH** is great for its omega-3 fatty acids, helping to lower fat in the liver.

Other amazing foods include **figs, garlic, ginger, grapefruit, grapes, Jerusalem artichokes, kiwifruit, leafy greens, legumes, lemons, limes, mangoes, nuts, oats, onions, oranges, sunflower seeds** and **watermelon**. ►





2 How do specific nutrients in food help improve liver enzyme function and reduce inflammation?

Specific nutrients play a role in lowering inflammation, which is essential for liver health, preventing fatty liver or hepatitis, and supporting liver function. For example, antioxidants combat oxidative stress – they neutralise free radicals that can harm the liver.

Omega-3 fatty acids reduce liver inflammation and lower fat build-up, supporting enzymes involved in fat metabolism. Choline, found in egg yolks, helps prevent fat accumulation in the liver, and polyphenols are anti-inflammatory and protect the liver. Fibre reduces liver inflammation by lowering blood glucose levels, and cholesterol and vitamins support detoxification in the liver. Glutathione, an antioxidant, supports detoxification and protects liver cells.

3 How quickly can someone expect to see changes in their health after improving their diet for liver support?

This depends on the state of the person's liver in the first place. We can see initial improvements in the first week where the liver enzymes will start to drop, reducing inflammation and bloating. Fat reduction will really start to take place around weeks three and four, and those who are losing weight at the same time, even with just a five per cent weight loss, can see a reduction in their liver fat. Significant health changes happen after about two to three months, with MASLD reductions, improved sensitivity to insulin and lower cholesterol readings, as well as much better liver enzyme readings. In my clinic, I would say those with advanced liver disease would really start to see changes at this stage.

4 Are there any common 'healthy' foods that might actually burden the liver without people realising it?

This may be the case if certain foods are consumed in excess, and it does depend on if the person has other health conditions. There isn't one-size-fits-all with this. It depends on the individual and their health status.

The foods that may burden the liver when consumed in excess include grapefruit, which can inhibit enzymes in the liver responsible for drug metabolism. Excessive amounts of cruciferous vegetables, which are amazing for supporting liver detoxification, can impair thyroid function in large doses, stressing the liver's phase 1 detox pathway. Also, I know we are all protein-obsessed now, but too much protein can burden the liver with nitrogen waste from the metabolism of amino acids. This is more important for people with existing liver or kidney issues. Too many natural sweeteners, including fruit juices, can also be a problem as they can contribute to fatty liver.

5 How does sugar and refined carbs intake impact liver health, and what alternatives do you suggest?

Excess sugar and refined carbohydrates directly affect the health of the liver leading to MASLD, insulin resistance and inflammation. High intake of sugar and refined carbs forces the liver to convert fructose into fat when consuming things such as high-fructose corn syrup. This leads to a fatty liver, aka steatosis. Lots of refined carbs mean blood sugar spikes that are rapid increases in blood glucose levels, triggering the pancreas to release insulin. Over time, cells become resistant to insulin, promoting fat storage in the liver. A lot of excess sugar promotes oxidative stress and, in the long term, drives up inflammation, increasing liver disease. And increased triglycerides – fat in the blood – results from the conversion of excess sugar, and this can lead to an elevated risk of fatty liver.

An alternative is to include complex carbohydrates in the diet, such as oats, brown rice, legumes and sweet potatoes, as well as lots of high-fibre, low-carbohydrate fruits, such as berries and citrus. To sweeten foods, you can use a small amount of natural sweeteners, such as maple syrup and honey or stevia and monk fruit. Snack on nuts, seeds and hummus with vegetable sticks. Make sure you have adequate fibre in your diet to keep blood glucose under control and manage sugar cravings. And stay well hydrated.

6 Is there a particular eating pattern that works best for maintaining liver health?

The best eating plan for the liver is one that focuses on lowering inflammation, supporting detoxification pathways and reducing liver fat, but, at the same time, it needs to be sustainable in the long term. The Mediterranean diet is excellent as it's full of good fats, as well as anti-inflammatory and antioxidant-rich foods. Lots of high-fibre foods help as well to promote bile production and reduce liver fat.

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7 What role do beverages play in either supporting or harming the liver?

Coffee lovers, rejoice! Coffee, in general, is great for the liver and is linked to a reduced risk of liver diseases such as fibrosis and cirrhosis, as well as liver cancer. Coffee lowers liver enzyme levels, reduces fat build-up, is anti-inflammatory, antioxidant-rich and supports detoxification.

Herbal teas can support the liver due to their anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Some can help with bile production and protect the liver from damage, but not all teas are safe. Dandelion root tea, turmeric tea, ginger tea and peppermint tea are all amazing for liver health. The ones to look out for are ones we don't normally see in supermarkets, such as kava and comfrey.

Alcohol does harm the liver. Drinking in excess will cause liver damage, leading to inflammation, fatty liver and cirrhosis. The liver works hard to break down alcohol, but if the consumption is ongoing, this can progress to what is called alcoholic hepatitis where liver cells are destroyed, and the liver is inflamed. When the abuse is chronic and over a long period of time, the damaged liver tissues become scar tissue and, in the worst-case scenario, can lead to liver failure.

No amount of alcohol is safe for the liver. Even moderate consumption can increase the risk of liver disease. Also, genetics and other health conditions can impact how the liver processes alcohol. The best advice is to significantly reduce alcohol intake or even avoid it altogether.

8 What other easy dietary tweaks can people make to support their liver?

I love adding herbs and spices to boost the nutritional profile of a recipe – and there are some amazing ones. Curcumin is an active compound found in turmeric and has powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Ginger is fabulous for its anti-inflammatory benefits, along with garlic. Coriander is also great for liver health by supporting detoxification pathways, and try garnishing with basil for antioxidant support.

9 For those already showing elevated liver enzymes, what's the first dietary change you suggest?

If they're drinking alcohol, I strongly suggest they stop or significantly cut back on their drinking. My next step would be to remove all sugar, processed and refined food from their diet. These foods drive up inflammation and will counteract any progress they make. Then offer simple changes, such as replacing snacks with fruit and nuts, keeping hydrated and including lean protein with each meal. The next steps would be to increase anti-inflammatory foods and to make sure there's enough fibre in their diet in the way of grains and vegetables.

10 How can someone tell if their diet is hurting their liver, outside of blood test results?

There are many signs and symptoms of liver disease that can range from mild to very obvious. People can go for many years and be completely asymptomatic before they show problems with their liver. Early signs are disturbed sleep, vomiting, weight loss, feeling sickly and having a tender abdomen.

More advanced signs are bad breath, feeling dizzy, hair loss, jaundice, fatigue, bleeding gums and cognitive impairment. Other signs may include a swollen abdomen, pain in the right shoulder, a fast heartbeat, dark stools and shortness of breath, as well as an increase in falls, muscle cramps, variations in body temperature, irregular periods, difficulty digesting food, itchiness and bruising easily.

Ready to make a difference to your health? Try the delicious, liver-supporting recipes from Sarah's book on page 116.



Introductory text extracted from *The Liver Repair Plan* by Sarah Di Lorenzo (Simon & Schuster, $39.99).

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