Fatty liver disease: patient education guide

MASLD, MASH, assessment, practical preparation and Ontario resources.

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General health information only. This guide does not diagnose a condition or replace an assessment by a qualified clinician.

Start with the big picture

Fatty liver disease is a broad term. MASLD means steatotic liver disease with at least one cardiometabolic risk factor. MASH is a more active form with inflammation and liver-cell injury. NAFLD and NASH are older terms that may still appear in reports.

Symptoms and diagnosis

- Many people have no liver-related symptoms at first.
- Tiredness or right-upper-abdominal discomfort can have many causes.
- Blood work and ultrasound are interpreted with history and examination; liver enzymes alone do not stage scarring.
- Clinicians may use non-invasive fibrosis assessment and specialist review when appropriate.

Causes and related conditions

Metabolic health, alcohol, medicines, supplements, viral hepatitis, autoimmune disease and inherited conditions can overlap. A careful history helps distinguish MASLD from alcohol-associated and other liver diseases.

Care topics to discuss

- Diabetes, blood pressure and lipid care
- Movement, eating patterns, sleep and food-access supports
- Alcohol or substance-use support without judgment
- Medication and supplement safety
- Fibrosis assessment, follow-up and referral when indicated

Medication classes are discussion topics only

A clinician or pharmacist may discuss medicines for diabetes, lipids, blood pressure, weight management or selected liver-directed therapies. Eligibility, contraindications, monitoring and coverage vary. This guide does not recommend a medicine or dose.

When to get help

Call 911 or go to an emergency department for new confusion or collapse, vomiting blood, black stools, severe or rapidly worsening abdominal swelling or pain, jaundice with severe illness or confusion, repeated vomiting or severe dehydration.

Ontario care and coverage

OHIP generally covers medically necessary insured physician and hospital services, but exact tests, settings and billing rules matter. Allied-health and dietitian services may be public, program-dependent or private. Prescriptions outside hospital are generally not covered by OHIP; ODB, OHIP+, Trillium, Exceptional Access and private plans have different rules. Confirm fees, referrals and eligibility directly.

Sources and limitations

Canadian sources are listed first. U.S., U.K., European and academic sources supplement them. Links were verified on 20 November 2026. Source content is copyrighted and is summarized in original wording.

CASL 2026 guidance: https://doi.org/10.3138/canlivj-2026-9-3-guidelines

Canadian Liver Foundation: https://liver.ca/fatty-liver-disease/

Diabetes Canada MASLD guideline: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40783292/

Obesity Canada adult guideline: https://obesitycanada.ca/healthcare-professionals/adult-clinical-practice-guideline/

Ontario OHIP coverage: https://www.ontario.ca/page/what-ohip-covers

Ontario medication coverage: https://www.ontario.ca/page/medication-coverage-results

Health811 Ontario: https://www.ontario.ca/page/your-health

HealthLink BC fatty liver: https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthwise/non-alcoholic-fatty-liver-nafl

AASLD MASLD guidance: https://www.aasld.org/practice-guidelines/clinical-assessment-and-management-metabolic-dysfunction-associated-steatotic

NIDDK NAFLD/NASH: https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease/nafld-nash

AGA non-invasive biomarkers: https://gastro.org/clinical-guidance/role-of-noninvasive-biomarkers-in-nafld-masld/

EASL-EASD-EASO guideline: https://easlcampus.eu/sites/default/files/2024-08/EASL_CPGs_management_of_MASLD.pdf

NICE NG49: https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng49/resources/nonalcoholic-fatty-liver-disease-nafldassessment-and-management-pdf-1837461227461

CADTH MASH health-systems report: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK623684/pdf/Bookshelf_NBK623684.pdf

American Family Physician 2026 review: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/42301877/