Who is at risk for pediatric NAFLD/NASH?

Children with obesity are at the greatest risk for developing pediatric NAFLD and NASH. Other factors such as type-2 diabetes, insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, or high cholesterol can increase a child's risk.

Pediatric NAFLD and NASH are more common in older children than in younger children and more common in boys than girls. For children with pediatric NAFLD, girls and boys are equally likely to get NASH.

While pediatric NAFLD/NASH occurs in all children, it is more common in Hispanic, Asian, and White children than African-American children. Further research supports that Hispanic children of Mexican origin have one of the highest incidences of NAFLD.
How is pediatric NAFLD/NASH diagnosed?

Fatty liver and pediatric NASH can have very few observable symptoms in the early stages. There are, however, several tests to diagnose pediatric NAFLD/NASH in children. These tests include:

1. General clinical history/exam
2. Blood tests
3. Imaging tests (e.g., ultrasound, MRI)
4. Liver biopsy

What happens if my child is diagnosed?

Currently, there are no approved medications for pediatric NAFLD/NASH. However, in early stages, it is possible to stop it from progressing to liver damage or pediatric NASH through lifestyle change with a focus on physical activity and nutrition.

If left untreated and the liver becomes so damaged to the point of failure, a liver transplant may be required for the child.
How can pediatric NAFLD/NASH be treated?

The amount of fat in the liver can be reduced through diet, physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, and adequate sleep. This can help treat and prevent pediatric NAFLD and NASH in children.

Nutrition

Switch sugary drinks and sodas for water or low-calories beverages

Don’t use sugary sweets/foods as a reward

Read the nutrition labels to look for hidden fat, sugar, and sodium

Avoid oversized portions for children. Consider using child sized plates

Have a goal of 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day

Stay away from fast food and fried food

Try not to eat processed foods

Activity

Aim for 60 minutes of physical activity a day. It does not have to be all at the same time. Walk more, exercise, take the stairs whenever possible.

Sleep matters. Have a regular bedtime for your child to ensure enough sleep. Ask your child's doctor for the amount of sleep they require each night.

Reduce screen time by limiting media use and device type. Avoid screen time while eating and making sure screen time does not interfere with sleep and physical activity

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What about clinical trials and my child?
Clinical trials are research studies, involving all ages, that look at novel ways to prevent, detect, treat disease, or improve quality of life. Research involving children helps scientists:

- identify care that is best for a child
- find the best dosage for medicines
- find treatments for conditions that affect children
- treat conditions that behave differently in children
- understand how treatment affects a growing child’s body

Sources


NASPGHAN Clinical Practice Guideline for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease in Children: Recommendations from the Expert Committee on NAFLD and the North American Society of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition; Miriam B. Vos, et al.


Clinical Trials for NAFLD & NASH in Children, NIDDK, NIH https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/liver-disease/nafld-nash-children/clinical-trials