British Liver Trust warns of fatty liver disease tsunami, due to the link between fatty liver disease and type 2 diabetes

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Two-thirds of people living with type 2 diabetes also have fatty liver disease[i] – but they may not be aware of it, warns the British Liver Trust. Fatty liver disease also significantly heightens the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. The charity urges people to get tested if they could be at risk, so both conditions can be managed effectively.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) estimates that by 2025, more than 5 million people in the UK will be diagnosed with diabetes. This means that the UK could be facing a tsunami of people newly diagnosed with fatty liver disease.

Fatty liver disease, or MASLD (metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease), which is characterised by excess liver fat, presents a growing health concern. Left unchecked, MASLD can escalate into severe MASH (metabolic associated steatohepatitis), potentially leading to liver failure or cancer.

Obesity is a major risk factor for both type 2 diabetes and fatty liver disease. By 2040, it is estimated that 21 million adults in the UK will be obese.

Vanessa Hebditch, Director of Communications and Policy at the British Liver Trust, stresses the urgency: "If you are diagnosed with fatty liver disease, losing weight and eating a healthy diet is the first line of treatment. There is good evidence that losing 5 to 10% of body weight can control and, in some cases, reverse the condition."

Fatty liver disease also significantly increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, a long-term condition that occurs when your body either doesn't produce enough insulin, a hormone that regulates blood sugar, or the insulin produced doesn't work properly. A study by Diabetes UK in 2022 found that having higher levels of fat in the liver directly increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes[i].

Vanessa continues, “Living with both fatty liver disease and type 2 diabetes can increase your likelihood of experiencing diabetes complications and developing more serious liver disease. For example, having both type 2 diabetes and fatty liver disease further increases your risk of heart disease[ii], so it’s important to find out if you could be affected."

Nine in 10 cases of liver disease are preventable with the main causes being excess weight, alcohol and viral hepatitis. To assess your risk of liver disease, visit www.britishlivertrust.org.uk/risk.

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