

Lockdown weight gain across the UK could lead to a surge in a life-threatening form liver disease, charity warns

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The British Liver Trust is warning of a potential future surge in a serious form of liver disease as a new survey reveals that four out of ten people in the UK have gained weight during lockdown.

Unhealthy eating habits developed during lockdown could lead to an increase in NASH, a serious form of non-alcohol related fatty liver disease (NAFLD). This follows the release of new data from a YouGov poll, which reveals that almost half of people think they have put on weight since 23rd March 2020 when lockdown began.

This stark warning comes on International NASH Day today (12th June 2020) a global campaign aimed at raising awareness of Non-alcohol related SteatoHepatitis (NASH), which is considered to be one of the major causes of cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver.

NASH affects approximately one in eight adults globally and over 3 million people across the UK. However as the disease usually has no symptoms in the early stages the true figure is likely to be much higher. It is expected that NASH will soon be the primary reason for liver transplants in the UK.

The YouGov survey commissioned by The British Liver Trust this week reveals that 42% admit to gaining weight since lockdown began. A third of people also claimed that they are eating more sugary and processed foods.

"The last few months has been an extremely stressful time, which has affected everyone in one way or another, from feelings of isolation to concerns about finances adding to the worry about the COVID-19 pandemic. It is no surprise that a lot of us have been turning to food for comfort," says Pamela Healy OBE, chief executive of the British Liver Trust. "Regular comfort eating can become a habit which can lead to obesity and a number of health-related issues including fatty liver disease."

More than 90% of liver disease cases in the UK is due to three main risk factors: obesity, alcohol and viral hepatitis.

"It is a common misconception that alcohol is the only preventable cause of liver disease however many people who don't drink develop liver disease. This why to reduce your risk of liver damage, you should place as much importance on eating a healthy diet as reducing your alcohol intake. NASH is a serious disease that can lead to a transplant or even death so it is important that we take steps to reduce the obesity epidemic that is affecting the UK and improve early detection. "

Maintaining a healthy weight through eating a well-balanced diet and taking regular exercise is the best way to prevent NASH from developing.

Pamela continues, "This is a really important time to be looking after ourselves, both mentally and physically. There are lots of other, much healthier ways, to deal with stress, like taking exercise, having a relaxing bath or learning a new hobby. Fostering healthier habits for stress management is a much better coping strategy for the long term."

The British Liver Trust's Love Your Liver campaign focuses on three simple steps to Love Your Liver back to health:

- Cut down on sugar, carbohydrates and fat and take more exercise
- Know the risk factors for viral hepatitis and get tested or vaccinated if at risk
- Drink within recommended limits and have three consecutive days off alcohol every week

The Trust provides support and detailed information for anyone with, or affected by a liver condition.

To find out if you are at risk of NASH the British Liver Trust has an online quiz. Please visit

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