

Steatotic liver disease (Fatty liver disease)



Steatotic liver disease (SLD) is commonly known as fatty liver disease. It's a condition when there is too much fat in your liver, caused by a combination of factors related to metabolism and lifestyle choices. Over time, this can be a problem and lead to serious liver conditions such as cirrhosis (scarring of the liver that causes it to stop working properly) and liver cancer.

What is SLD?

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A healthy liver has very little or no fat. Steatotic liver disease is diagnosed when 5% – 10% of the weight of your liver is made up of fat. This is usually caused by a combination of factors over a long period of time.

Before we get into the details of steatotic liver disease, it's important to understand the terminology, as many of the terms traditionally used to describe fatty liver disease have changed.

What are the new terms?

The term 'fatty liver' is now outdated. In June 2023, the American Association for the Study of Liver Disease (AASLD) chose a new term 'Steatotic liver disease (SLD)' to describe fatty liver disease.

There are several reasons this term was chosen. For example, it:

- more accurately reflects what causes too much fat on the liver
- helps to describe how complex and serious this condition is
- removes the association with alcohol consumption, which can be confusing.

Note: your doctor, family or friends might still only know the term fatty liver disease.

What does steatotic liver disease mean?

The term 'steatotic' refers to the process of 'steatosis', which is a complex term for fat build-up in the liver. Doctors may also call steatotic liver disease 'hepatic steatosis' (hepatic refers to liver).

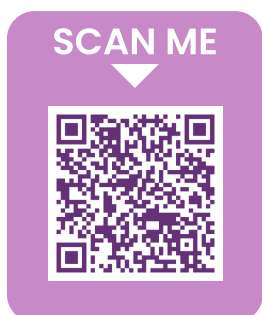
Steatotic liver disease is an umbrella term used to describe various causes of fatty liver disease. There are four sub-groups of SLD:

1. **Metabolic Dysfunction Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD)** (*pronounced MA-zuld*) – This is when steatosis is caused by factors other than excessive alcohol use. It's usually associated with high cholesterol, obesity, and diabetes. MASLD used to be known as NAFLD (non-alcoholic fatty liver disease).
2. **Metabolic-associated steatohepatitis (MASH)** – This is a more serious form of MASLD. MASH used to be called NASH (non-alcoholic steatohepatitis).
3. **MetALD** (*pronounced: Met A-L-D*) – This is when people have MASLD with increased alcohol intake. This is a new term.
4. **Cryptogenic SLD** – This is when people have fatty liver disease without any known cause or any metabolic risk factors. This is a new term.

How common is SLD?

Steatotic liver disease is a growing concern around the world, including Australia. Over the past 15 years, rates of SLD have risen in Australia, along with increased rates of obesity and diabetes.

Currently, about one in every three people in Australia have SLD. It's expected that within the next 20 years, SLD will be the leading cause of liver transplant.



Visit our SLD webpage here.

Our comprehensive SLD Essentials Toolkit is coming this August.



Information written by Nerissa Bentley,
The Melbourne Health Writer, 2024

How does SLD affect your health?

In its early stages, SLD doesn't usually cause symptoms so many people won't know they have a problem. Most people with SLD won't develop long-term problems with their liver.

Some people with SLD can end up with serious damage to their liver, including:

- inflammation
- fibrosis (when a band of scar tissues forms) which causes the liver to become stiff
- cirrhosis (when extensive scar tissue replaces healthy tissue), which stops the liver from working properly
- liver failure
- liver cancer.

Some people with advanced liver disease may need a liver transplant.