

Family of patients with NAFLD and cirrhosis are at increased risk of liver fibrosis

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Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is a common disorder characterized by abnormal accumulation of fat in the liver. NAFLD is diagnosed in up to one in three adults and one in 10 children in the United States, and obesity is the greatest known risk factor. While NAFLD itself does not damage the liver, inflammatory responses to fat deposits can lead to liver scarring and cirrhosis. NAFLD patients that develop cirrhosis have a substantially worse prognosis, with an elevated risk of mortality due to liver disease.

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Family members of individuals with NAFLD are at a higher risk for developing NAFLD themselves, but whether this is accompanied by a predisposition toward [liver disease](#) is not known. A clinical trial led by Rohit Loomba at UCSD assessed whether the immediate relatives of individuals with NAFLD and cirrhosis are at higher risk of developing advanced fibrosis.

In a report published this week in the *JCI*, the researchers used an MRI-based imaging technique to quantify liver scarring (or fibrosis) in the siblings, parents, and offspring of patients with NAFLD and cirrhosis. They determined that the relatives of individuals with NAFLD and cirrhosis exhibited 12 times higher prevalence of [liver fibrosis](#) than healthy controls, even when the researchers adjusted for age, sex, ethnicity, [body mass index](#), and diabetes status.

These findings indicate that the immediate family members of individuals diagnosed with NAFLD and [cirrhosis](#) may benefit from screenings for liver fibrosis.

More information: Cyrielle Caussy et al, Nonalcoholic fatty liver disease with cirrhosis increases familial risk for advanced fibrosis, *Journal of Clinical Investigation* (2017). DOI: [10.1172/JCI93465](https://doi.org/10.1172/JCI93465)

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