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Study links consumption of fast food to liver disease

Risk of liver damage is highest for those with obesity or diabetes

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A recent study from the US is giving people extra motivation to reduce fast-food consumption. The study found that eating fast food is associated with nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, a potentially life-threatening condition in which fat builds up in the liver.

Researchers discovered that people with obesity or diabetes who consume 20% or more of their daily calories from fast food have severely elevated levels of fat in their liver compared to those who consume less or no fast food. And the general population has moderate increases of liver fat when one-fifth or more of their diet is fast food.

While previous research has shown a link between fast food and obesity and diabetes, this is one of the first studies to demonstrate the negative impact of fast food on liver health, according to the researchers.

The findings also reveal that a relatively modest amount of fast food, which is high in carbohydrates and fat, can hurt the liver. "If people eat one meal a day at a fast-food restaurant, they may think they aren't doing harm," said the researchers. "However, if that one meal equals at least one-fifth of their daily calories, they are putting their livers at risk."

The researchers hope that the study will encourage healthcare providers to offer patients more nutrition education, especially to those with obesity or diabetes who are at higher risk of developing a fatty liver from fast food.

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