

## The Devastating Effects of NASH, Called the Soda Disease

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### DESCRIPTION

It affects 1% of the world's population and is growing fast: Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis or NASH, caused by a build-up of fat in the liver, progressively impairs liver function. It will be the focus of an international day of prevention on 12 June.



"We have to stop the majority of patients finding out about the disease by chance, when it's too late to treat it. Liver damage is painless and silent. So providing information and raising awareness can save lives." In his book *NASH, La Maladie de la malbouffe* (Flammari- on), which was published in March, the Parisian hepato-gastroenterologist Dominique Lannes launches a general call to protect one of our most vital organs. Like the heart, the liver, which works to process the nutrients carried by the blood, converting them into vitamins, hormones or fuel for the whole body, is overwhelmed by excess sugar and fat, two components omnipresent in the modern-day diet.

Over his career, the French doctor has seen significant changes in his patients' livers, which have become increasingly fatty over the last thirty years. It is a common finding: "We estimate that 30% of the population is now affected by steatosis, in other words a build-up of fat within the liver," Dominique Lannes says. "At that stage, we can still act, but it's the first step to developing NASH, a disease that some public health authorities readily call the 'scourge of the century' and is silently increasing because of what we eat."



## Fatty Liver Disease

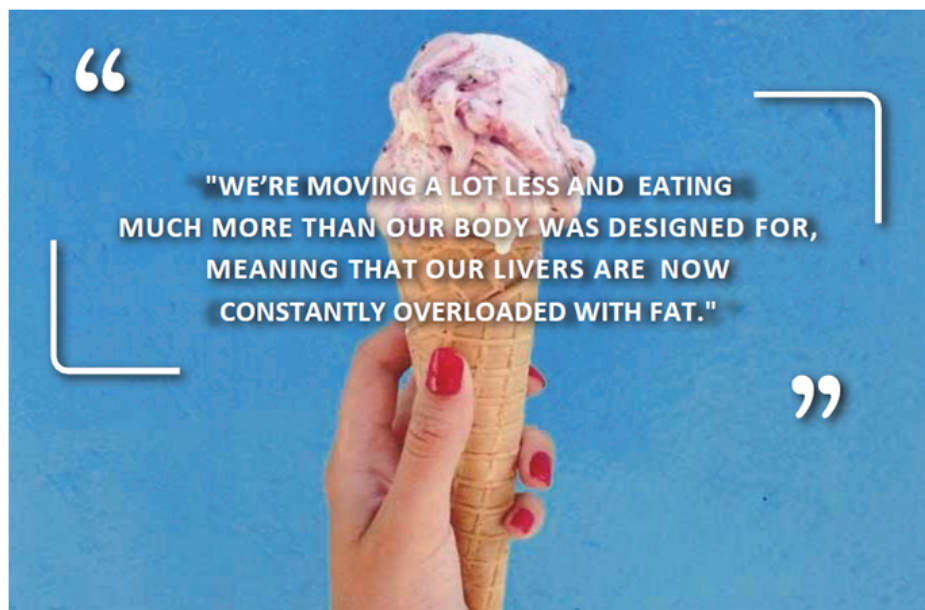
NASH, the acronym for nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, also known as "soda disease", is a condition that progressively impairs liver function. As its name suggests, it is caused not by alcoholism or a virus, but by the simple presence of fat, largely resulting from a diet of mass-produced, processed food. Still largely unknown to the general public, the syndrome, which affects 1% of the world's population, will have its first international day on 12 June. Awareness-raising events will be held across Switzerland, particularly in Bern.

Remaining silent and undetected for several years, NASH develops over several phases. In an initial stage, following a constant excess of nutrients, the liver becomes fatty, like foiegras. If it continues over the long term, the damage can lead to fibrosis. Scar tissue then starts to form inside the organ and surround the hepatocytes, the liver cells particularly involved in breaking down toxic substances. Over time, the normal architecture of the liver changes, becoming harder, and the blood struggles to circulate, causing cirrhosis, which is likely to develop into cancer. A transplant often becomes essential for survival, which is why NASH is now the main reason for liver transplantation in the U.S.

## Global Progression

Linked to a poor diet, but also to prolonged sedentarism, made worse by obesity, diabetes and very probably genetic predispositions, NASH is far from limited to Western countries. The global expansion in fizzy drinks and processed food has contributed to the increasing number of NASH cases in both Asia and Africa. Once essentially diagnosed in patients in their sixties, NASH also seems to affect more and more young adults. "Ultimately, the disease results from a mismatch between our physiology and our environment," explains Jean-François Dufour, Clinical Director at Inselspital and Professor of Hepatology at the University of Bern.

For the time being, there is no treatment to cure NASH. Several molecules are, however, currently in phase III clinical studies and being tested on large patient cohorts, raising hopes that a drug will be available within a few years. "We also need to develop diagnostic tools based on imaging or markers in the blood, which we could offer the many patients suspected of having NASH," adds Jean-François Dufour.



“Currently, the only way to make a reliable diagnosis, other than anamnesis, is a liver biopsy, which is an invasive procedure. That’s why it’s only offered to patients presenting with advanced signs of the disease.”

If, as Dominique Lannes says, we are all potential candidates for NASH, how can we reduce steatosis or simply avoid saturating our liver in fat? “We have to remember that it’s all a question of excess,” he replies. “Cholesterol, for example, is essential for cell formation, so we need it. The only thing that I can prescribe is trying to reduce your fat and sugar intake and move more. Obviously, it’s very hard to drastically change your lifestyle, but whilst we don’t have any treatments, prevention is better than cure.”

“When we look in detail, we can see that some sugars are more damaging than others,” Jean-François Dufour adds. “Top of the list is essentially corn syrup. With its high fructose content, it has been added to sugary food and drinks since the 1980s. It tends to reduce the feeling of satiety, which means that we eat more.” Some fats are also thought to be more beneficial than others. Mice studies conducted by the laboratory of Bernard Thorens, professor at the University of Lausanne’s Centre for Integrative Genomics, have demonstrated that coconut oil increases the breakdown of fats in the liver, for example. A meta-analysis also claims to prove the positive effects of omega 3, although that remains unproven.



More concretely, recent research has shown that early-stage steatosis in obese children could be reduced very quickly when their calorie intake was changed and sugary foods and drinks were replaced with healthy Alternatives, which may reignite public debate on the introduction of a sugar tax.

## AUTHOR PROFILE

### About Me:

I am a driven and dynamic business leader, with more than 24 years’ experience across a range of senior leadership, commercial and advisory roles in the Pharmaceutical & Healthcare sector and also great individual entrepreneurship’s experience in Marketing, Communication & Events, International Affairs, Training & Coaching.

Having demonstrated success and a passion for building and transforming businesses, I have honed the required skills to lead people through repositioning and cultural change, whilst maintaining a real focus on excellence in execution. With a proven track record in developing and delivering international leading edge strategies and exceeding profit goals, I have established a breadth of skills spanning. Specifically, I use acquired expertise, to contribute to cross-functional teams that take projects, from strategic vision to successful operational delivery, always having the creation of competitive advantage and real customer focus as a priority, using my scientific background and my commercial orientation.



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