Obesity-Related Liver Disease Linked to a Leaky Gut

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Non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), which is a severe and increasingly common form of fatty liver disease, may be linked with leaking in the intestinal wall, according to new research published in the journal Cellular and Molecular Gastroenterology and Hepatology, Health Canal reports.

NASH is associated with obesity and diabetes, and it can lead to serious liver problems such as cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and hepatocellular carcinoma (liver cancer). Researchers say the findings help better explain how NASH develops in the body and could help doctors better identify patients who are at-risk for the disease.

According to recent animal studies, people with NASH are far more likely to have a condition known as “intestinal permeability,” which seemingly allows bacteria from the gut to move into the bloodstream. This, in turn, worsens liver disease, as the organ struggles to clear the toxins from the body.

Researchers also found that liver damage itself also increased the risk for gut leakage. The findings further promote the hypothesis of a “gut-liver cross-talk,” where both systems are closely linked, and each symbiotically worsens the other’s effect on the body.

NASH is increasing at an alarming rate in the U.S., with up to 30 percent of American adults currently suffering from the disease. If left untreated, NASH can eventually lead to cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma, the most common form of liver cancer. There is currently no cure for end-stage fatty liver disease.

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