New Test Gets High Marks

This blood exam makes screening easier for folks with a certain type of liver disease.

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Until now, the preferred method for detecting liver damage in people living with non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, or NAFLD, was an invasive biopsy, a surgical procedure that samples a small portion of the liver to determine its level of fibrosis (scarring and thickening). But recent studies showed that biopsies can lead to misdiagnosis in 20 to 40 percent of people with hepatitis and may cause pain and bleeding.

Now, there's a new blood test, called the enhanced liver fibrosis (ELF) test, that helps doctors quickly discover and monitor advanced liver fibrosis among people diagnosed with NAFLD.

The test requires only a blood sample and produces results within an hour. Docs now recommend the ELF test for all NAFLD patients. Adults with the condition are retested every three years; children and young people are retested every two years.

With the ELF test, a primary care provider can include liver fibrosis monitoring among a patient's routine blood tests. Experts say the test is less invasive, more accurate and far more convenient compared with liver biopsies or scans. Plus, the test is reliable for checking liver fibrosis scores in people with viral and alcoholic hepatitis.

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