

# Assessing the Role of Nutritional Status in Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) Management: Insights from Sonographic Monitoring and Nursing Care

Wafaa A. Alkhamis<sup>1</sup>, Kholoud S. Alqassem<sup>2</sup>, Maha Y. Qattan<sup>3</sup>,  
Shatha A. Alkhamis<sup>4</sup>, Ali M. Algublan<sup>5</sup>, Moutaz F. Alluhaydan<sup>6</sup>

Health Affairs at the Ministry of National Guard

## Abstract

Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) is a prevalent condition linked to obesity, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome. This study aimed to assess the impact of a multidisciplinary intervention, involving individualized nutritional counseling, sonographic monitoring, and nursing support, on the management of NAFLD in a tertiary hospital setting. A total of 150 patients were recruited and divided into intervention and control groups. Findings indicated significant improvements in liver fat content, liver enzyme levels (ALT and AST), and adherence to dietary recommendations in the intervention group compared to the control group. This research highlights the effectiveness of a multidisciplinary approach in improving patient outcomes in NAFLD management.

**Keywords:** NAFLD, Nutritional Counseling, Sonographic Monitoring, Nursing Support, Multidisciplinary Intervention, Liver Health, Obesity, Metabolic Syndrome

## Introduction

Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) is an increasingly prevalent condition worldwide, often associated with obesity, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome (Younossi et al., 2016). NAFLD is characterized by excessive fat accumulation in the liver, unrelated to significant alcohol consumption, and affects approximately 25% of the global population (Farrell & Larter, 2006). The disease spectrum ranges from simple steatosis, which is often asymptomatic, to non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH), which can progress to cirrhosis and liver failure (Angulo, 2002). Given its widespread nature, NAFLD has become a significant public health concern, necessitating effective management strategies that target underlying metabolic factors.

Nutritional status plays a critical role in the management of NAFLD, as dietary habits are key contributors to the development and progression of the disease. Studies have shown that diets high in saturated fats and simple sugars contribute to hepatic fat accumulation, while dietary modifications, such as reducing caloric intake and increasing fiber consumption, can improve liver health and reduce fat content (Marchesini et al., 1999; Zelber-Sagi et al., 2007). Effective dietary intervention is thus recognized as a cornerstone in the

management of NAFLD, aimed at improving liver function and preventing disease progression (Chalasan et al., 2012).

Sonographic monitoring is a non-invasive and reliable method for assessing liver fat content and is commonly used in the diagnosis and follow-up of NAFLD patients (Saadeh et al., 2002). Ultrasound imaging helps to quantify hepatic steatosis and monitor changes in liver morphology over time, making it an essential tool in evaluating the effectiveness of nutritional interventions (Bellentani et al., 2000). Moreover, nurses play a crucial role in the multidisciplinary management of NAFLD by providing patient education, supporting adherence to dietary modifications, and offering continuous care to encourage lifestyle changes (Clark et al., 2002).

This study aims to assess the role of nutritional status in managing NAFLD, utilizing sonographic monitoring to evaluate liver changes and highlighting the vital role of nursing care in patient education and support. By integrating the expertise of clinical nutritionists, sonographers, and nursing professionals, this research seeks to explore how a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach can enhance the management of NAFLD and improve patient outcomes.

## Literature Review

The prevalence of NAFLD has increased significantly over the past few decades, driven by rising rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes (Younossi et al., 2016). NAFLD is considered the hepatic manifestation of metabolic syndrome and is associated with insulin resistance, dyslipidemia, and obesity (Farrell & Larter, 2006). The progression of NAFLD from simple steatosis to non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH) is influenced by multiple factors, including genetics, diet, and lifestyle (Angulo, 2002).

Dietary habits are one of the most significant modifiable factors in the development and progression of NAFLD. High consumption of saturated fats and simple carbohydrates has been linked to increased hepatic fat accumulation, whereas dietary modifications, such as increased intake of omega-3 fatty acids and dietary fiber, have shown potential in reducing liver fat content and improving liver function (Marchesini et al., 1999; Zelber-Sagi et al., 2007). A study by Zelber-Sagi et al. (2007) highlighted the importance of long-term nutritional intake in mitigating the risk of NAFLD, emphasizing that diet quality is a key determinant of liver health.

Caloric restriction and weight loss have been consistently recommended as effective strategies for managing NAFLD. Marchesini et al. (1999) demonstrated that weight loss through caloric restriction and increased physical activity leads to a reduction in liver fat and an improvement in liver enzymes. Similarly, Chalasan et al. (2012) outlined the importance of lifestyle interventions, including dietary changes and physical activity, in the management of NAFLD, with a focus on achieving a weight loss of 7-10% to significantly reduce hepatic steatosis.

Sonographic monitoring is a widely used non-invasive method for assessing liver fat and diagnosing NAFLD. Saadeh et al. (2002) demonstrated the utility of ultrasound in detecting hepatic steatosis, providing a cost-effective and accessible tool for monitoring disease progression. Although magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and liver biopsy are considered more accurate, ultrasound remains the preferred method in clinical settings due to its availability and non-invasiveness (Bellentani et al., 2000).

The role of nursing in the management of NAFLD is crucial, particularly in patient education and lifestyle modification support. Clark et al. (2002) highlighted the importance of nurse-led interventions in improving patient adherence to dietary and physical activity recommendations. Nurses are often the primary healthcare professionals involved in educating patients about the risks of NAFLD and the benefits of lifestyle changes, as well as providing ongoing support to ensure adherence to treatment plans (Clark et al., 2002).

Given the multifactorial nature of NAFLD, a multidisciplinary approach is essential for effective management. Collaboration between clinical nutritionists, sonographers, and nurses can provide comprehensive care that addresses the dietary, diagnostic, and educational needs of patients with NAFLD. This approach not only helps in managing liver fat accumulation but also in preventing the progression of NAFLD to more severe stages, such as NASH and cirrhosis.

## Methodology

This study was conducted in a tertiary hospital over a period of 12 months. The study population consisted of adult patients diagnosed with NAFLD, recruited from the hospital's gastroenterology and hepatology outpatient clinics. Inclusion criteria included patients aged 18 years and older, diagnosed with NAFLD via ultrasound, and willing to participate in a multidisciplinary intervention program. Patients with significant alcohol consumption, other liver diseases, or severe comorbidities were excluded from the study.

A total of 150 patients were enrolled in the study. Participants were divided into two groups: an intervention group and a control group. The intervention group received individualized nutritional counseling from a clinical nutritionist, along with regular sonographic monitoring and nurse-led educational sessions. The control group received standard care, which included general dietary advice without specific interventions or regular follow-up.

Nutritional counseling sessions were held bi-monthly and focused on reducing caloric intake, increasing fiber consumption, and incorporating healthy fats into the diet. The clinical nutritionist worked closely with each patient to create personalized dietary plans, aiming for gradual weight loss of 7-10% over the study period. In addition, patients in the intervention group received educational support from nurses, which included information on NAFLD, the importance of lifestyle modifications, and strategies to improve adherence to dietary recommendations.

Sonographic assessments were conducted at baseline, 6 months, and 12 months to evaluate changes in liver fat content and morphology. A trained sonographer performed all ultrasound examinations using a standardized protocol to ensure consistency in measurements. The primary outcome was the reduction in hepatic steatosis, as assessed by ultrasound, while secondary outcomes included changes in body weight, liver enzyme levels (ALT and AST), and patient-reported adherence to dietary recommendations.

Nursing support was provided throughout the study, with nurses conducting monthly follow-up calls to address patient concerns, provide motivation, and ensure adherence to dietary and lifestyle recommendations. The nurses also coordinated with the clinical nutritionist and sonographer to ensure that each patient's progress was monitored effectively.

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Continuous variables were expressed as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation, and categorical variables were presented as frequencies and percentages. Paired

t-tests were used to compare changes within groups, while independent t-tests were used to compare differences between the intervention and control groups. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## Findings

The study found significant improvements in liver fat content, body weight, and liver enzyme levels in the intervention group compared to the control group. Table 1 summarizes the baseline characteristics of the participants, while Table 2 presents the changes in key outcome variables over the 12-month period.

**Table 1: Baseline Characteristics of Participants**

Characteristic	Intervention Group (n=75)	Control Group (n=75)
Age (years)	45.3 ± 10.5	46.1 ± 9.8
Male (%)	52	50
BMI (kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	31.7 ± 4.2	32.1 ± 3.9
ALT (U/L)	56.4 ± 20.3	55.9 ± 21.1
AST (U/L)	45.2 ± 18.7	46.0 ± 17.4
Liver fat grade (ultrasound)	Grade 1: 35%, Grade 2: 40%, Grade 3: 25%	Grade 1: 33%, Grade 2: 42%, Grade 3: 25%

**Table 2: Changes in Key Outcome Variables Over 12 Months**

Outcome Variable	Intervention Group (n=75)	Control Group (n=75)	p-value
Weight loss (%)	8.5 ± 2.1	2.3 ± 1.0	<0.001
ALT (U/L)	38.2 ± 15.4	52.1 ± 19.6	<0.001
AST (U/L)	32.5 ± 13.9	44.8 ± 16.8	<0.001
Liver fat grade (ultrasound)	Grade 1: 60%, Grade 2: 30%, Grade 3: 10%	Grade 1: 35%, Grade 2: 40%, Grade 3: 25%	<0.001
Adherence to dietary recommendations (%)	85	55	<0.001

The intervention group achieved a significantly greater reduction in hepatic steatosis, as evidenced by improvements in ultrasound-determined liver fat grade. At 12 months, 60% of participants in the intervention group had reduced their liver fat to Grade 1, compared to only 35% in the control group. In addition, the intervention group showed significantly greater reductions in ALT and AST levels, suggesting improved liver function. The percentage of participants adhering to dietary recommendations was also significantly higher in the intervention group (85%) compared to the control group (55%).

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that a multidisciplinary intervention, including individualized nutritional counseling, sonographic monitoring, and nursing support, is effective in managing NAFLD and improving patient outcomes. The intervention group showed significant reductions in hepatic steatosis, as well as improvements in liver enzyme levels (ALT and AST) and body weight compared to the control group. These results highlight the importance of a comprehensive, patient-centered approach to managing NAFLD, which addresses both dietary and lifestyle modifications.

The reduction in liver fat grade observed in the intervention group is consistent with previous studies that have emphasized the importance of weight loss and dietary modifications in reducing hepatic steatosis (Marchesini et al., 1999; Chalasani et al., 2012). Achieving a weight loss of 7-10% has been shown to significantly reduce liver fat, and our findings support this recommendation. The intervention group, which received personalized dietary plans and regular follow-up, achieved an average weight loss of 8.5%, which was associated with significant improvements in liver health.

The role of sonographic monitoring in assessing changes in liver fat content was also validated in this study. Ultrasound provided a reliable and non-invasive method to track the effectiveness of nutritional interventions over time, supporting its utility in clinical settings (Saadeh et al., 2002). The significant reduction in liver fat grade in the intervention group further demonstrates the value of sonography in monitoring treatment progress and guiding clinical decision-making.

Nursing support played a critical role in the success of the intervention. Nurses provided ongoing education, motivation, and follow-up, which likely contributed to the higher adherence rates observed in the intervention group. Previous research has highlighted the importance of nurse-led interventions in promoting adherence to lifestyle changes (Clark et al., 2002), and our findings align with these conclusions. The intervention group's adherence rate of 85% underscores the effectiveness of continuous nursing support in achieving sustained lifestyle modifications.

The control group, which received standard care without individualized support or regular follow-up, showed minimal changes in liver fat content, liver enzyme levels, and adherence to dietary recommendations. This highlights the limitations of standard care in managing NAFLD and underscores the need for structured, multidisciplinary interventions to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Overall, this study supports the implementation of a multidisciplinary approach involving clinical nutritionists, sonographers, and nurses in the management of NAFLD. The combination of personalized dietary interventions, regular sonographic monitoring, and continuous nursing support led to significant improvements in liver health, highlighting the need for a comprehensive strategy to address the multifactorial nature of NAFLD.

Future research should explore the long-term sustainability of these interventions and their impact on preventing the progression of NAFLD to more severe stages, such as NASH and cirrhosis. Additionally, the potential role of other lifestyle factors, such as physical activity and stress management, in enhancing treatment outcomes should be further investigated.

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## خلاصة

هو حالة منتشرة مرتبطة بالسمنة والسكري من النوع 2 ومتلازمة التمثيل الغذائي. تهدف هذه (NAFLD) مرض الكبد الدهني غير الكحولي الدراسة إلى تقييم تأثير التدخل متعدد التخصصات، الذي يشمل الاستشارة الغذائية الفردية، والرصد بالموجات فوق الصوتية، ودعم في بيئة المستشفى الثالث. تم تجنيد ما مجموعه 150 مريضاً وتقسيمهم إلى مجموعات التدخل والسيطرة. NAFLD التمرريض، على إدارة ، والالتزام بالتوصيات الغذائية في (ALT وAST) أشارت النتائج إلى تحسن كبير في محتوى الدهون في الكبد، ومستويات إنزيمات الكبد مجموعة التدخل مقارنة بالمجموعة الضابطة. يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على فعالية نهج متعدد التخصصات في تحسين نتائج المرضى في إدارة NAFLD.

، استشارات غذائية، مراقبة بالموجات فوق الصوتية، دعم التمرريض، تدخل متعدد التخصصات، صحة الكبد، NAFLD: الكلمات المفتاحية السمنة، متلازمة التمثيل الغذائي