

An improved way of diagnosing fatty liver

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A painless magnetic resonance investigation can now be implemented for diagnosing fatty liver.

The standard method used for diagnosing fatty liver involves taking a tissue sample, or biopsy, from the liver and examining it in a microscope for assessing the amount of fat present. The biopsy procedure can involve some discomfort for the patient, and there is a small risk of profuse bleeding as well.

Excess energy from food and drink can be stored as fat in the liver. Fatty liver increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. But the amount of fat in the liver can be reduced by adapting changes in lifestyle, and this significantly reduces the risk of such diseases.

A new study was carried out by researchers at Linköping University and Region Östergötland to address this concern. They observed that magnetic resonance technology can measure very low percentage of the liver weight that consists of fat. Currently, a level of 5% fat in the liver is considered to be the limit for diagnosis of fatty liver by magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS). But the researchers showed that even 3% of liver fat detected by MRS can lead to liver damage.

This new finding suggests that MRS makes it possible to follow small changes in the fat amount in the liver eliminating the use of biopsies.