

# Liver disease is a ticking timebomb

## EXCLUSIVE

By **Danny Buckland**

LIVER disease caused by obesity and poor lifestyle is a "ticking timebomb" for the NHS, experts say.

Around three million Britons are believed to have dangerous levels of fat building up around their livers which could lead to organ breakdown and the need for transplants.

The condition, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), is mainly caused by obesity and Type 2 diabetes and is on the rise in the UK.

"It is a huge problem and the biggest indicator for having NAFLD is being overweight," said Vanessa Hebditch, a director of the British Liver Trust.

"With almost one third of adults and 38 per cent of children overweight, the estimate is it will have overtaken alcohol as the leading cause of liver disease by 2020. It has already happened in the US."

The condition starts with fatty cells increasing around the liver which can progress to inflammation and scarring, known as cirrhosis of the liver.

Around 20 per cent of the population is thought to have NAFLD, while five per cent have developed advanced stages of the condition.

"Having a bit of a fatty liver is a

## Cancer risk from delaying trip to GP

PEOPLE are potentially delaying early cancer diagnosis because they are "too busy" to see their GP, research reveals. The YouGov survey also shows as many as 15 per cent of people refer to "doctor Google" to check for cancer symptoms.

The survey of 2,100 people, released today to mark World Cancer Day, revealed more than one in 10 would put off calling their GP for at least a month over a changed mole, or lesion on their body – even though these could be a sign of cancer.

One in 20 indicated they would be reluctant to seek medical advice at all for these symptoms. Over a third blamed a fundamental lack of time.

Professor Kamila Hawthorne, of the Royal College of GPs, said: "Modern life can be really hectic but it's important our health doesn't take a back seat."

warning sign," said Mrs Hebditch. "If you change your diet, reduce your weight and don't smoke you have a good chance of turning it around."

"Liver disease is a timebomb and in 50 years, little more than a generation, figures have risen 400 per cent. The problem is there are often no real symptoms and 75 per cent of conditions are diagnosed in hospital settings when it is at an advanced stage.

"Over the last decade we have also seen a 10-fold increase in the number of adults with NAFLD who need transplants."

The British Liver Trust wants to see more scanning tests being made

available across the NHS to catch the condition early. The warning comes as an investigation revealed a 52 per cent jump in NHS diabetes medication prescriptions, from 25 million in 2010/11 to 38.5 million in 2016/17.

Benjamin Caller, of analytics database firm Exasol, which uncovered the figures, said: "Type 2 diabetes is an enormous concern for society."

Health expert Andrea Cameron, of Abertay University, Dundee, said: "Lifestyle types of disease arising from being sedentary are on the increase and if we don't take action, with the NHS already creaking at the edges, how is the system going to cope? There is no magic pill."