pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 2, February -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

COMPARATIVE HISTOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF LIVER TISSUE IN NON-ALCOHOLIC FATTY LIVER DISEASE

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Abstract

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) is one of the most common chronic liver disorders worldwide, closely associated with obesity, insulin resistance, and metabolic syndrome. Histological examination remains the gold standard for evaluating disease severity and progression. This article presents a comparative histological analysis of liver tissue in different stages of NAFLD, including simple steatosis and non-alcoholic steatohepatitis (NASH). Structural alterations such as lipid accumulation, hepatocellular ballooning, inflammatory infiltration, and fibrosis are analyzed. Understanding histological differences between disease stages is essential for accurate diagnosis and appropriate clinical management.

Keywords: NAFLD, NASH, liver histology, steatosis, fibrosis, inflammation.

Introduction

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease encompasses a spectrum of liver conditions ranging from simple steatosis to non-alcoholic steatohepatitis, fibrosis, and cirrhosis. It develops in individuals without significant alcohol consumption and is strongly linked to metabolic disorders.

Histological evaluation of liver tissue provides critical information regarding the degree of fat accumulation, inflammatory activity, hepatocyte injury, and fibrotic transformation. Differentiating between simple steatosis and NASH is particularly important because NASH carries a higher risk of progression to advanced liver disease.

Objective

The objective of this study is to perform a comparative histological analysis of liver tissue in various stages of non-alcoholic fatty liver disease and to identify structural differences associated with disease progression.

Methods

This study is based on a review of histological findings from liver biopsy specimens obtained from patients diagnosed with NAFLD. Microscopic evaluation was conducted using hematoxylin-eosin staining for general tissue structure and special staining methods such as Masson’s trichrome for fibrosis assessment.

Key parameters analyzed included degree of steatosis, presence of hepatocyte ballooning, inflammatory cell infiltration, sinusoidal changes, and fibrosis staging. Comparative analysis was performed between samples classified as simple steatosis and those diagnosed as non-alcoholic steatohepatitis.

Results

Histological examination of simple steatosis revealed accumulation of lipid droplets within hepatocytes, predominantly in the centrilobular region. Hepatocyte nuclei were displaced

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 2, February -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

peripherally due to intracellular fat deposition. Minimal inflammatory infiltration was observed, and fibrosis was generally absent or mild.

In contrast, samples diagnosed with non-alcoholic steatohepatitis demonstrated significant hepatocellular ballooning, cytoplasmic rarefaction, and increased inflammatory cell infiltration, particularly lymphocytes and macrophages. Mallory-Denk bodies were occasionally present. Progressive perisinusoidal and periportal fibrosis was detected in advanced cases.

Comparative analysis showed that inflammation and fibrosis were the key distinguishing features between simple steatosis and NASH. These histological differences correlate with increased risk of disease progression and long-term complications.

Discussion

The histological progression of NAFLD reflects the transition from simple lipid accumulation to active inflammatory injury and fibrotic remodeling. Steatosis alone may remain stable for years; however, when accompanied by hepatocellular injury and inflammation, the risk of fibrosis and cirrhosis significantly increases.

The presence of ballooned hepatocytes and inflammatory infiltration indicates oxidative stress and mitochondrial dysfunction. Chronic inflammation stimulates activation of hepatic stellate cells, leading to extracellular matrix deposition and fibrosis development.

Understanding these microscopic changes is essential for accurate staging and prognosis. Histological assessment remains the most reliable method for distinguishing between benign steatosis and progressive NASH.

Conclusion

The comparative histological analysis of liver tissue in non-alcoholic fatty liver disease clearly demonstrates that structural alterations progress from simple lipid accumulation to active inflammatory injury and fibrotic remodeling. While simple steatosis is primarily characterized by intracellular fat deposition with minimal inflammatory response, non-alcoholic steatohepatitis represents a more advanced and clinically significant stage marked by hepatocellular ballooning, inflammatory infiltration, and progressive fibrosis.

The presence of hepatocyte injury and inflammation serves as a critical turning point in disease progression. Chronic inflammatory activity stimulates activation of hepatic stellate cells, leading to excessive extracellular matrix deposition and the development of fibrosis. Over time, this process may progress to cirrhosis, portal hypertension, and even hepatocellular carcinoma. Therefore, distinguishing between simple steatosis and NASH is essential for predicting long-term outcomes and guiding therapeutic strategies.

Histological evaluation remains the gold standard for accurate staging of NAFLD, as imaging and laboratory markers may not reliably differentiate between benign and progressive forms of the disease. Early detection of inflammatory and fibrotic changes allows for timely intervention, including lifestyle modification, metabolic control, and potential pharmacological treatment.

In conclusion, the progression of NAFLD is reflected by distinct histological transformations within liver tissue. Careful microscopic assessment provides valuable diagnostic and prognostic information. Emphasizing early diagnosis and targeted management strategies may significantly reduce the burden of advanced liver disease associated with non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:13,Issue 2, February -2026 eISSN:2349-5715

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