

In order to play your best under stressful tournament conditions you need to have a clear mind and be well-rested. Proper nutrition can help in this area. I'm not a nutritionist (nor do I play one on TV) but it is well known that the consumption of liver has many health benefits. It provides many key nutrients. In fact, liver is one of the most nutritionally dense foods on the planet. Its high cholesterol content is often offset by its other benefits. However, like most foods, once it's fried, it is not quite as healthy – just like fried chicken is not nearly as healthy as grilled or baked chicken.

Similarly, subjecting yourself to the Fried Liver Attack can be unhealthy for your chess rating.

“What is the Fried Liver Attack?” you ask. Thanks for asking!

Most of you have probably had the position below at some point in your chess journey – whether playing white or black. After the moves: 1.e4 e5, 2.Nf3 Nc6, 3.Bc4 Nf6, 4.Ng5 white is clearly targeting black's weak f7 square.



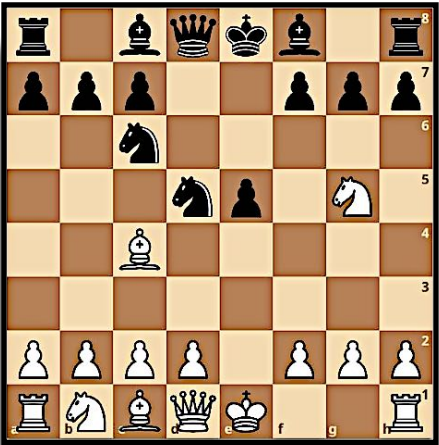
Siegbert Tarrasch (1862-1934), the great German chess master, famously called white's 4.Ng5 a “real duffer's move.” Well, there must be a lot of “duffers” out there because this is a very popular move. According to the database, white wins the majority of games when this move is played. Chess engines do not consider this a bad move. It *does* violate the general principle of not moving the same piece twice in the opening, but there are always exceptions to general principles. This is *not* the Fried Liver Attack, however. Technically, this is the Knight Attack variation of the Two Knights Defense.

The f7 square is not easily defended by black. It seems like 4...d5, blocking the bishop's diagonal, is the only move – and it's also the most often-played move. Black has some tricky alternatives, however; namely 4...Bc5 (Traxler Counterattack) or 4...Nxe4 (Ponziani-Steinitz Gambit), ignoring white's attack on his f7 square altogether. You might want to check out those interesting lines. They are both very wild. In fact, my first (and only) win against a 2000+ player, when I was only rated about 1500, was when I was playing the black side of a Traxler Counterattack. My opponent made the mistake of playing a book line against a much weaker opponent. It was no longer, “Who is the better chess player?” He clearly was. It became, “Who can remember the book lines the best?” I knew all the moves by heart because I had prepared this in advance. I wrote to Chess Life and asked Larry Evans about a line that occurred in that game. I got a Best Question Award for that issue. So, to quote Ron Burgundy (Will Ferrell) from the movie Anchorman, "I'm kind of a big deal." This was over 30 years ago. I wish I had a score of that game. I don't even have the Chess Life issue anymore. Maybe it's in a box in my attic.

Chess Life,
April 1989.



After the following moves are played: 4...d5, 5.exd5 Nxd5, we have the position below.



5...Nxd5 is rarely played at higher-levels. 5...Na5 is the preferred move. However, amateurs play this move frequently. This is where white has a choice to make.

Does he want to jump into the Fried Liver Attack? It starts with 6.Nxf7, a knight sacrifice. Of course, he's going to play it! Nobody plays the Knight Attack variation if they're not prepared to sac their knight. Chess engines think 6.d4 is actually white's best move but the majority of players drool over the opportunity to sac their knight, almost as if they have just been served some fried liver with sautéed onions. 6.Nxf7 actually scores better than 6.d4.

Of course, black must capture the knight since it is forking his queen and rook. Black plays 6...Kxf7. White follows up with 7.Qf3+ with a double attack on black's king and knight. If black wants to hold on to his extra piece (and he usually does), he has to play 7...Ke6. Now the fun begins. White keeps putting pressure on the pinned knight on d5 and also has his eye on black's exposed king in the middle of the board.



I checked the Lichess master database and there have been 17 master games played that have reached the above position. White won nine - black won five - three games were drawn. White does even better in the non-master database. There are many more non-master games, most of which are won by white.

It looks scary, but theory says that black can defend this position. It won't be any fun, however – kind of like eating fried liver isn't very fun especially with a side of Brussels sprouts. [repressed gag]

You might be thinking, “Sure, high-rated players might play this online, just for fun. But, they would *never* adopt this in a serious game.” You'd be wrong! My research indicates that very high-rated players *have* gone down this path – more times than you might imagine. As an example, below are three games played by grandmasters who decided to jump into the Fried Liver Attack in a tournament game. All three games were won by white. *Theoretically*, black can defend the attack. *Practically*, not so much. The first two games were in blitz tournaments with prize money on the line. The third game was played in the 2014 Olympiad.

Awonder Liang (2592) vs Pavel Ponkratov (2631) 8-02-2020



Sergei Zhigalko (2671) vs Simon Agdestein (2602) 12-30-2016



Shirov, Alexei (2709) vs Sulskis, Sarunas (2544) 8-3-2014



One interesting thing to note about the above three games is that, in each case, the player with the black pieces had a completely different idea for defending, all to no avail.

There is a thread on the chess.com forum entitled "[Do you like the fried liver attack?](#)" It's somewhat comical.

"Lame opening for lame chess players." -toiyabe

"Hack players will play hack openings." -Mr-Endron

"I hate it - it's the glorification of the noobish hack attack every 7 year old wants to win with." -AlisonHart

"It's a childish opening, and very easy to neutralize." -Jadulla

IM Levy Rozman, arguably one of today's most popular chess streamers, has a very good introduction and analysis of the Fried Liver Attack on YouTube, even though the title is somewhat clickbaity, WIN IN 8 MOVES – The Fried Liver Attack.

Siegbert Tarrasch was not just an extremely talented chess player, he was also a medical doctor. He probably knew that 4.Ng5 was going to be hazardous to *both* players' health, so he tried to discourage it by characterizing it as a "real duffer's move," hoping that people would stop playing it. There is actually a defense called the Anti-Fried Liver Defense where black plays 3...h6, preventing 4.Ng5 altogether. That defense doesn't do particularly well. It strikes me as a scaredy-cat way of playing.

When black plays 5...Nxd5 instead of the better (and more common) 5...Na5, it's like they're sticking their jaw out and daring you to "Take your best shot!" They're *daring* you! Give the Fried Liver Attack a try. Sac that knight - even though Bobby Fischer thinks white should play 6.d4. What the heck did he know? The stats don't lie. You'll probably win.