



Dangers of Belly Fat (Yegyan, was this taken from a specific source? I it copywrited by someone?)

Doctors should measure more than your weight at appointments. They should measure your waist.

For years, scientists have observed that an apple-shaped figure or a big beer belly is a health risk. But now they have gained more insight into why this is so.

They have discovered that people with wide girths are more likely to have large amounts of deep-hidden belly fat around their organs. It might be the most dangerous kind of fat and could increase a person's risk of diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some types of cancer.

This fat, which is called visceral or intra-abdominal fat, is linked to **high cholesterol, high insulin, high triglycerides, high blood pressure and other problems.**

And because most people in the USA weigh too much and many carry extra weight in the belly, experts are racing to discover how to reduce the killer fat.

At greatest risk of developing health problems from too much hidden belly fat are men whose waists are wider than 40 inches and women whose waists are wider than 35 inches. If your waist measurement is that high, "you've fallen off the edge of the cliff," says George Blackburn, associate director of the division of nutrition at Harvard Medical School.

People with waists that wide need to reduce them *immediately*, says Robert Ross, an exercise physiologist at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. But even people whose waists are several inches smaller could be at risk, he says.

Experts say they don't know the optimal waist size for good health. But they do know this: Your waist circumference "is an absolute vital sign" in determining your health, Blackburn says. You need to know this plus your weight and body mass index, a formula that takes height and weight into account.

"In addition to the stethoscope around their necks, physicians should be carrying a tape measure," Ross says. Waist circumference is an independent risk factor for serious diseases, similar to factors such as weighing too much and high blood pressure, he says.

Most people don't know how much hidden belly fat they have because the only accurate way to determine it is with CT or MRI scans. But doing those tests for millions of people is unnecessary and too costly. And measuring waist girth is a very good guide.

Although people who are overweight or obese are more likely to have large amounts of visceral fat, normal-weight people also can have too much.

Older people need to be particularly vigilant about their waist measurement. A recent study found that some men and women 70 to 80 years old with normal body weight still had an increased risk of type 2 diabetes if they had large amounts of visceral fat.

"An important factor is where in the body their excess fat is stored," says Bret Goodpaster, assistant professor in the division of endocrinology and metabolism at the University of Pittsburgh.

Scientists aren't sure why some people have more of this fat than others. As people get older, they often become less active, which could partly explain the increase in the fat, Ross says.



"The processes by which we lay down excess visceral fat are not completely understood. It's very likely that genes, sex hormones and stress hormones (cortisol) play a role."

He says that as men age, many notice that their belly gets bigger, and they start losing muscles in their legs. Women experience similar effects.

The two fats act differently in the body, experts say. "If you put visceral fat in a petri dish and you put subcutaneous fat in a petri dish and stimulate them, the visceral fat will produce a lot more inflammatory molecules that can raise a person's risk of heart disease and diabetes," says Tim Church, medical director of the Cooper Institute in Dallas.

Blackburn says, "We can't keep stuffing our faces with fat and take a little stroll and think we are doing ourselves any good."

"If from one checkup to another, you put on a few pounds, go up a notch on the body mass index chart or gain an inch or two around the waist, then you need to put the brakes on it," Blackburn says. You need to adopt "a new lifestyle that reduces your caloric intake, improves the quality of the food in your diet and increases the amount of daily exercise."

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