

Risk Around the Waist **by the American Institute for Cancer Research**

Body Mass Index (BMI) is one common method used by researchers and health care professionals to measure overweight and obesity. The BMI chart shows the range of healthy and unhealthy weight for different heights. You can contact the American Institute for Cancer Research to order a free BMI Calculator by calling 800-843-8114 extension 110.

But some of the nations' premier researchers now say that waist fat poses far more health dangers than fat stored elsewhere. Medical experts are urging greater use of a waistline measurement when assessing health risk in adults.

A Wider Waist May Increase Insulin Production

The reason for measuring the waist appears to be twofold. First, studies link waistline or abdominal obesity with greater risk of some cancers. Scientists believe that higher levels of insulin and insulin-like growth factors commonly seen with excess abdominal fat stimulate cancer cell growth. Excess waistline fat seems to approximately double the risk of breast cancer in women after menopause, regardless of overall weight status.

Abnormal insulin levels may also disrupt sex hormones, thus raising the risk of prostate cancer, which is hormonally related.

Second, large waists are one of the clinical indicators of metabolic syndrome. People with metabolic syndrome are at greater risk for diabetes, as well as high blood pressure.

They are also more likely to develop elevated markers for inflammation, high uric acid (which can lead to gout) and an increased tendency for blood clotting. Metabolic syndrome doubles the risk of heart attack or stroke, according to one new study.

People can inherit a susceptibility for metabolic syndrome and possibly for storing fat on the waist. But lifestyle choices, like too high of a calorie intake and sedentary behavior coupled with aging and some medications or health problems, actually trigger the syndrome to develop. Regular exercise and a balanced diet that maintains a healthy weight are the best strategies to control waistline fat, prevent metabolic syndrome and reduce cancer risk.

How Do You Measure Up?

To assess a possible cancer risk due to excess body fat, measure your waist circumference. Place a tape measure around your waist immediately above the tip of the hipbone. Measure right after you exhale. For women, a waist measurement of 35 inches or more indicates high risk. For men, the significant figure is 40 inches or more.

In most cases, if a waistline measurement shows high risk, the BMI reading will be 30 or more, indicating obesity. However, if the BMI number is less than 30, you should still consider your situation serious if the waist measurement shows high risk.

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