

Metabolic syndrome: time to take action!

If you have excess body fat located around your waistline, if your blood pressure is too high, or if blood tests show that you have abnormal values of certain types of fat (cholesterol or triglycerides) or sugar (glucose), you may have metabolic syndrome. When any of these abnormal conditions exist on their own, they must be taken seriously. The health threat is much greater if several of them are present, particularly for the health of your heart. Fortunately, you can improve, or even correct, these abnormal values with a healthy lifestyle. Here's why it's time to take action quickly!

How do I know if I have it?

Metabolic syndrome is not a specific illness, but a series of abnormal values.

The presence of **at least three of the five criteria** below confirms the diagnosis of metabolic syndrome.*

Values from:

Physical exam	1 Increased waist circumference (indicative of abdominal obesity)	Men	Over or equal to 102 cm (40 in.)
		Women	Over or equal to 88 cm (35 in.)
Blood tests	2 Elevated blood pressure		Over or equal to 130/85 mm Hg ⁺
	3 Elevated triglyceride level (a type of fat)		Over or equal to 1.7 mmol/L ⁺
	4 Reduced HDL cholesterol level ("good" cholesterol)	Men	Less than 1.03 mmol/L ⁺
		Women	Less than 1.29 mmol/L ⁺
	5 Elevated fasting blood glucose (sugar level)		Over or equal to 5.6 mmol/L ⁺

⁺ or receiving treatment with a medication that controls this value.

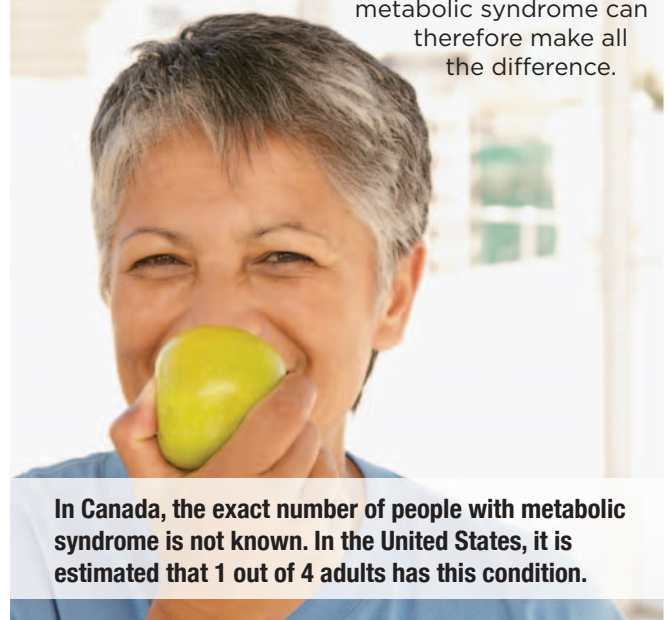
* According to the NCEP-ATPIII criteria, National Institutes of Health, United States, 2001, (adaptation 2005).

When the system becomes unbalanced...

Some people are genetically predisposed to metabolic syndrome. However, this problem is mainly the result of a sedentary lifestyle, unbalanced diet, and overeating. These habits often lead to being overweight, which has negative effects on the entire body, especially if the weight gain is located in the abdominal area.

Why should I be concerned?

Although metabolic syndrome generally doesn't have any specific symptoms, it is a major health risk. The main dangers associated with it are the risks of developing diabetes, with all of its complications, or having a heart attack or stroke. For example, people with metabolic syndrome are three to five times more likely to have a heart attack than are people without metabolic syndrome. Early screening for metabolic syndrome can therefore make all the difference.



In Canada, the exact number of people with metabolic syndrome is not known. In the United States, it is estimated that 1 out of 4 adults has this condition.



Acting to counter metabolic syndrome with the ...

4 WINNING STRATEGIES

Treatment for metabolic syndrome mainly aims to improve and correct abnormal values (waist circumference, blood pressure, triglycerides, cholesterol, glucose) in order to avoid complications. The most effective approach is to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Changing habits doesn't happen by snapping your fingers; for many people, it takes a couple of months to turn things around. If you go at your own pace and do things you like, you're more likely to get results and maintain them down the road.



MAINTAIN OR REDUCE YOUR WEIGHT

Weight loss of between 5 and 10 kg (10 and 20 lbs.) often improves several of the abnormal values associated with metabolic syndrome. Don't fall for miracle diets that promise rapid weight loss. The best way to lose weight is by gradually changing your habits in order to BE MORE ACTIVE and EAT HEALTHY.



BE ACTIVE 30 min. ON MOST DAYS

Increasing the level of physical activity is often very beneficial to those with metabolic syndrome. **Being active for 30 minutes per day at an intensity that makes you slightly short of breath is an excellent goal.** You can play a sport that you like or simply walk briskly and energetically. If you choose a low-intensity activity, such as walking at a normal pace, you should do so for 45 to 60 minutes.

You don't have to do all your daily activity at once. You can spread it out throughout the day into several blocks of at least 10 minutes each.



EAT HEALTHY

When you choose healthy foods, you give yourself the best possible chance to fight metabolic syndrome.

- Include more fruit and vegetables in your meals and snacks.
- Choose whole-grain products (e.g., whole-wheat bread, bran cereals, oatmeal, whole-wheat or multigrain pasta, brown rice).
- Have dairy products every day and choose lower-fat products (milk and yogurt with 2% or less milk fat (M.F.), cheeses with 20% or less M.F.).
- Eat more fish, legumes, and tofu, and enjoy chicken without the skin, as well as lean meats.
- Limit your intake of candy, chips, chocolate, soft drinks, and fried and fast foods.
- Avoid alcohol or limit your intake to one drink per day.

In addition to watching the choices that you make, **keeping an eye on quantities** is a good strategy. Asking yourself if you are hungry before automatically putting something in your mouth is a good habit to get into. Eating slowly, decreasing portion sizes, avoiding seconds, and not feeling obliged to clean your plate are other ways to avoid consuming extra calories.

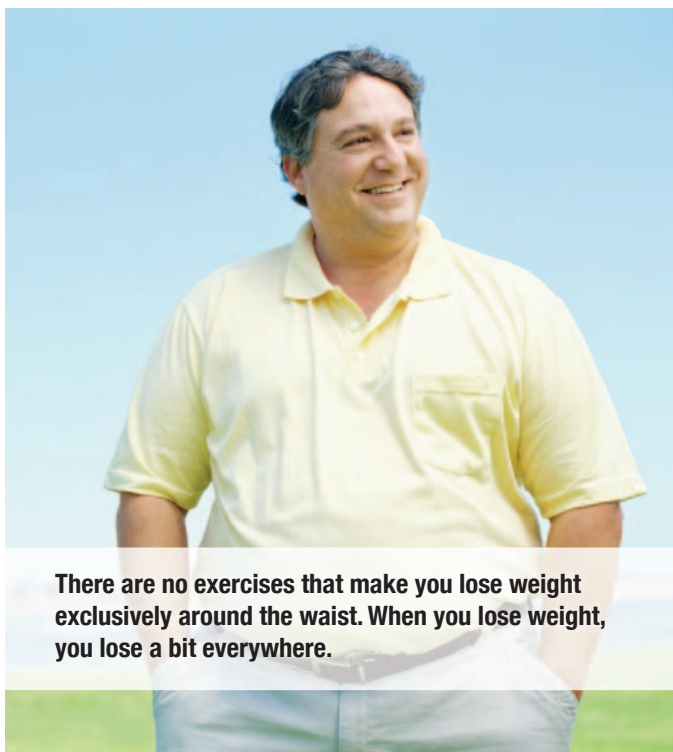


DO NOT SMOKE

Some studies suggest that smoking may also play a role in the development of metabolic syndrome. In any case, quitting smoking is an advantage to your health in general, such as the health of your heart.

What about medication?

There are no medications that are designed specifically to treat metabolic syndrome. Medications are available to lower blood pressure and levels of triglycerides, cholesterol, or glucose. If you are taking one or several medications, it is important to follow your doctor's recommendations, even if you don't feel sick. And don't forget the "4 strategies": they provide many benefits.



There are no exercises that make you lose weight exclusively around the waist. When you lose weight, you lose a bit everywhere.