

Obesity and Cardiovascular Disease

PHOTO: AL BUSCHAUER

WE MOVE SLOWER THAN GLACIERS, AND WE EAT TOO MUCH. No wonder obesity has become a major health problem in the United States.

Obesity is associated with an increased risk of health problems in general and cardiovascular disease (CVD) in particular. And we are getting heavier every day as a nation.

The latest data presented by the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey demonstrate the prevalence of overweight adults increased from 55.9 to 64.5 percent and from 22.9 to 30.5 percent for obese adults. It's similar in most developed nations which indicates there's an international epidemic of obesity.

Then there's the body mass index.

Multiply weight in pounds by 703, divide by height in inches, and divide again by height in inches. The following BMI values are used to define body composition.

- ➔ Normal: 18.5 to 24.9
- ➔ Overweight: 25 to less than 30
- ➔ Obesity: 30 or greater
- ➔ Morbid Obesity: 40 or greater

How do you know if you are overweight? Take a tape measure and wrap it around your waist at your belly button. If it's 40 inches or more in men and 35 inches or more in women, it's high risk. But cardio vascular risk among overweight and obese individuals is not always easy to define by a single measurement. How body fat is distributed affects risk, too. Abdominal obesity increases risk much more than obesity in other parts of the body. How? It's better to be shaped like a "pear" instead of an "apple". It appears that abdominal obesity

is associated with resistance to insulin and inability to properly metabolize blood glucose. This can lead to abnormalities of blood lipids, which show up in blood tests as high serum triglycerides and low serum good cholesterol levels. You can be predisposed to developing high blood pressure as well as an inflammatory state.

It's called "Metabolic Syndrome" and about 47 million American adults have a combination of these factors based on obesity, blood levels and blood pressure (usually higher than 130 over 85).

If you're one of those people who "number crunches" your health factors, here's how to measure yourself for "Metabolic Syndrome":

- Abdominal Obesity, defined as waist circumference in men greater than 40 inches and in women greater than 35 inches
- Serum triglycerides greater than 150 mg/dl
- Serum HDL cholesterol less than 40 mg/dl in men and less than 50 mg/dl in women
- Blood pressure greater than 130/85
- Fasting blood glucose greater than 100 mg/dl

There are multiple studies showing that individuals with the "metabolic syndrome" are at least twice as likely to develop heart disease or stroke, and are three to five times as likely to develop diabetes. It is important for those at risk for metabolic syndrome to work with their health care professional to develop a treatment plan to decrease the risk. You probably can guess at the mix of improvements. There will be lifestyle changes, such



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as incorporating 30 minutes of daily moderate-intensity exercise (brisk walking), weight control, and diet. Maintaining a more ideal waist circumference is important in this mix, as is a wide spectrum of medicines.

For those wondering if liposuction will help, sorry. Studies show that despite weight loss, there is no improvement associated with the metabolic syndrome. In patients who can't lose weight by lifestyle changes alone, there is a benefit from gastric bypass surgery because this leads to the loss of abdominal fat and improvement in metabolic abnormalities.

Obesity and sedentary lifestyle are risky for everyone. By incorporating a healthy lifestyle including a daily physical activity, you can help maintain an ideal body shape and decrease risk of heart disease. But talk to your doctor. 