

# Metabolic Syndrome

To understand what “metabolic syndrome” means to you and your health, it’s helpful to know some basic definitions of the two words. *Metabolic*, or metabolism, concerns all the ways that the body creates and uses energy, including digesting food and circulating blood. *Syndrome* is a group of symptoms that occur together. So *metabolic syndrome* is the term doctors use to describe someone who has multiple disorders of the metabolism at the same time. These disorders include excessive weight, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.



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## *Is Metabolic Syndrome Serious?*

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Metabolic syndrome is a serious health issue: it increases the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD), according to experts at the National Institutes of Health in Washington, DC. In fact, metabolic syndrome is now considered as dangerous to heart health as cigarette smoking.

You might hear metabolic syndrome also called “insulin resistance syndrome” and “syndrome X”—and you might be hearing more about it as time goes on. Health researchers estimate that about 47 million US residents have metabolic syndrome. At least one out of every five overweight people may be affected. A recent study found that metabolic syndrome is widespread in the United States and may become an important health issue.

## *What Causes Metabolic Syndrome?*

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There are three basic causes of metabolic syndrome.

- Being overweight or obese
- Being physically inactive
- Heredity

There’s a close link between metabolic syndrome and *insulin resistance*, a condition involving the sugar (glucose) that the body’s cells use for energy. Insulin resistance can lead to diabetes. Although the reason for the link isn’t clear, it’s known that most people who are insulin resistant have abdominal obesity.

## *How a Diagnosis Is Made*

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While there aren’t any general guidelines for determining if you have metabolic syndrome, a doctor *can* tell if you have several metabolic risk factors. These include overweight or obesity (especially around the abdomen) and high or low levels of certain substances in the blood.

The National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) from the National Institutes of Health has identified several benchmarks that help identify metabolic syndrome. If three or more of these are present, a person has metabolic syndrome.

Risk Factor	Benchmark Level
Abdominal Obesity Men Women	Waist Measurement More than 40 inches More than 35 inches
Triglycerides (a kind of fat in blood)	150 mg/dL or higher
HDL cholesterol ("good" cholesterol) Men Women	Less than 40 mg/dL Less than 50 mg/dL
Blood pressure	130/85 or higher
Fasting glucose	110 mg/dL or higher

## *How Metabolic Syndrome Is Treated*

As with all health matters, your doctor is your best source of information and advice for treating metabolic syndrome. Generally, the recommended first course of action is to lose weight if you're overweight or obese and to get more exercise.

Additionally, these steps can help reduce your health risks from metabolic syndrome.

- Lower your blood pressure—weight loss and more physical activity can help here, along with medications when needed
- Lower your cholesterol—more exercise, a healthy diet low in saturated fats and high in fiber, and medications, if necessary, are advised
- Stop smoking—smoking makes the health problems of metabolic syndrome much worse



# Remember

Only your doctor can tell you if you have metabolic syndrome, but one risk factor is being overweight or obese—especially around the abdomen.