



Metabolic syndrome explained

I've often heard of "metabolic syndrome," but what is it, exactly?

Well, you might be confused because not everyone agrees on the exact definition.

But basically, according to MedlinePlus (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>), a service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health, metabolic syndrome is a group of conditions that put people at higher risk for both diabetes and heart disease. They are:

- High blood pressure.
- High blood sugar levels.
- High blood levels of triglycerides.
- Low blood levels of HDL, the good type of cholesterol.
- Too much fat around your waist.

Some authorities say if you have three or more of these conditions, you have metabolic syndrome, also known as "syndrome X." Metabolic syndrome isn't a new disease — it's just an easy way to describe a set of risk factors that doctors increasingly see lumped together in their patients.

Other factors can also increase the risk of heart disease, including smoking and having high levels of LDLs (the bad type of cholesterol), but they're not part of metabolic syndrome. That doesn't mean they're any less risky — they just aren't as commonly grouped with those other risk factors.

It's possible that metabolic syndrome is caused by insulin resistance. That's when the body's tissues have trouble using insulin

(produced by the pancreas) to accept the glucose that's flowing through your bloodstream. Type 2 diabetes results when glucose resistance becomes extreme.

If you have metabolic syndrome, your doctor may prescribe medications to treat the conditions diagnosed. But you can take other steps, too, to reduce your risk, including:

- Improving your diet. First, make sure you regularly eat a wide variety of produce. Try to make half of your diet fruits and vegetables — and while you're at it, focus on the vegetables, which tend to be lower in calories than fruit. When eating dairy products, including milk, cheese and yogurt, choose low- or nonfat types. Try to make half the grains you eat whole grains, and choose lean proteins (such as beans, soy, white chicken meat or fish, for example).

- Increasing your level of physical activity. Most people should get 30 to 60 minutes of moderate exercise five days a week, but check in with your doctor and start slowly if you haven't been active in a while. Physical activity offers a double bonus: Not only does it help you burn calories, but it helps reduce your blood sugar levels, and may even decrease LDL cholesterol, too.

For more guidance, see http://1.usa.gov/met_synd.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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