

Metabolic Syndrome

What is metabolic syndrome?

Metabolic syndrome is a condition that increases your risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. It is a very common and dangerous medical problem. You may be diagnosed with metabolic syndrome if you have 3 or more of the following risk factors for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes:

- Excess weight around the waist (a waistline of more than 40 inches for men and more than 35 inches for women)
- Triglycerides blood level of 150 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dL) or more
- HDL cholesterol levels lower than 40 mg/dL for men and below 50 mg/dL for women
- Blood pressure of 130/85 mm HG or higher
- A fasting blood sugar (glucose) equal to or greater than 100 mg/dL (5.6 mmol/L), including
 - Prediabetes (a fasting sugar between 100 and 125 mg/dL, or between 5.6 and 6.9 mmol/L)
 - Diabetes (a fasting blood sugar level over 125 mg/dL, or over 6.9 mmol/L)

Other terms used for metabolic syndrome are insulin resistance syndrome and syndrome X.

What is the cause?

Overweight, poor diet, a lack of exercise, and other unhealthy lifestyle habits, such as smoking, may make it more likely that you will have metabolic syndrome. It tends to run in families, so the genes you inherit can play a role but so can family lifestyles, such as relying too much on fast food.

What are the symptoms?

Metabolic syndrome does not have symptoms.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will examine you and check your blood pressure and your waist measurement. You will have blood tests to measure:

- Triglycerides
- HDL cholesterol
- Blood sugar

A fasting blood sugar test or a hemoglobin A1C test may be done to check your blood sugar.

How is it treated?

The most important part of treatment is lifestyle change:

- More physical activity as recommended by your healthcare provider to improve your fitness and to lose weight
- A healthier diet
- Not smoking

Your healthcare provider may prescribe medicines to treat risk factors, especially if you are unable to decrease your risks with diet changes or increasing your activity level.

- Aspirin may help prevent blood clots, strokes, and heart attacks. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as aspirin, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, do not take for more than 10 days. Check with your healthcare provider before you give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, and Pepto-Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
- Blood pressure medicines can reduce your blood pressure to help prevent stroke and heart damage.
- Cholesterol medicine can bring down high triglyceride levels. It can also raise your HDL, or "good" cholesterol, levels. (If you are a smoker, quitting will also raise your HDL.)

How long will the effects last?

If metabolic syndrome is not treated, you are much more likely to have a heart attack, stroke, or diabetes. Decreasing your risk factors by increasing your physical activity and losing weight can help prevent these health problems. You may see great improvement with only a 5 to 10% weight loss. Your blood sugar levels may go back to normal. These changes in lifestyle, along with a healthier diet and medicines if needed, can also improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels. Making lifestyle changes and taking medicines as prescribed can add years to your life, especially if you stop smoking.

How can I take care of myself?

- Get regular aerobic exercise (like walking at a good pace) according to your healthcare provider's recommendations. **Being more active can help improve every one of the health problems that contribute to metabolic syndrome.**
- Eat less animal fat, less sugar, and fewer white potatoes, white rice, and white flour products (like white bread, white biscuits, white pancakes). Replace these products with olive and canola oil, nuts, avocados, fish (especially salmon, mackerel and tuna), lean meat, fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain breads and cereals.

- Lose weight.
- Take all medicines according to your provider's instructions.
- Don't smoke.
- Keep your follow-up appointments with your healthcare provider.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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