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Metabolic Syndrome: A Concerning Cluster of Conditions



While most laypeople may not have heard of **metabolic syndrome**, it is estimated that up to one-third of Americans may actually live with this highly concerning cluster of common conditions and risk factors that can prove extremely deleterious to your health.

If you're concerned about decreasing your risk of having a stroke, a heart attack (myocardial infarction, or "MI"), or developing diabetes, then understanding how to avoid the conditions that can lead to these life-altering — and potentially life-threatening conditions — is extremely wise.

The Cluster of Four

The disturbingly common conditions that, when experienced together, constitute metabolic syndrome are:

- High blood pressure
- Elevated blood sugar
- High LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol, and elevated triglycerides
- Excess abdominal body fat

While these physiological manifestations can be strongly influenced by genetics, we know that lifestyle modifications can fight back against their effects — and often reverse them significantly, if not altogether.

Let's break these four dangerous factors down:

High blood pressure (hypertension) occurs when the force of the blood coursing through your blood vessels is higher than it should be. Nearly half of all Americans have hypertension, and since it's one of the leading causes of heart attacks and strokes, it's often referred to as "the silent killer".

Elevated blood sugar (hyperglycemia) is a sure sign that something is...

wrong when it's chronic in nature. High blood sugar can be caused by Type I or Type II diabetes, stress, overeating, and other factors. Symptoms can include excessive thirst, appetite, and urination, as well as headache and high levels of glucose in the urine.

High LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol, and high triglycerides (lipid disorder) can lead to blockages in your coronary (heart) arteries. Triglycerides are produced when your body takes excess calories that you've consumed and turns them into body fat. While HDL and LDL cholesterol and triglycerides serve important functions in the body, they can be life-threatening when out of balance.

Excess abdominal body fat: Excess abdominal fat is not a laughing matter. According to [an article](#) on the website of Harvard University Medical School, "*visceral fat has been linked to metabolic disturbances and increased risk for cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. In women, it is also associated with breast cancer and the need for gallbladder surgery.... Visceral fat is directly linked with higher total cholesterol and LDL (bad) cholesterol, lower HDL (good) cholesterol, and insulin resistance.*"

Pushing Back Against Metabolic Syndrome

A sedentary lifestyle, belly fat, known risk factors for diabetes or hypertension, and an unhealthy lipid panel can all point to an accentuated risk... for developing metabolic syndrome and the diseases that naturally follow.

How do we push back against metabolic syndrome, diabetes, hypertension, and the rest? Here are some **recommendations**:

- Switch to an eating plan that favors heart health, which means limiting the amount of saturated and trans fats in your diet, and instead choosing nutritious foods like fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and sources of lean protein
- Maintain a healthy weight, which includes getting regular cardiovascular exercise
- Decrease stress
- Quit smoking

- Decrease alcohol intake
- Use medications when prescribed to control blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol

While we can't fight our genetic heritage, we can choose to change our lifestyle so that the metabolic syndrome "cluster of four" doesn't come home to roost. Remember what constitutes the cluster of four: high blood pressure; elevated blood sugar; high LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol, and elevated triglycerides; and excess abdominal body fat. And then remember that you have the power to push back, improve your health, and keep metabolic syndrome out of the story of your life, overall health, and potential for longevity and healthy aging.

November 27, 2020 by [Keith Carlson](#)

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