

A Consumer's Guide to Understanding the Metabolic Syndrome or How to Quit Club Metabolique

What is the metabolic syndrome?

The metabolic syndrome has many names, including dysmetabolic syndrome, syndrome X, insulin resistance syndrome, and several others. The term, “metabolic syndrome” is applied to persons who suffer from obesity around the waist line, elevated cholesterol or triglycerides, and high blood pressure. These individuals usually suffer from Type II diabetes, which is common in older persons.

Why is the metabolic syndrome important?

The metabolic syndrome is important for three reasons: 1) people with the metabolic syndrome may have increased risks for heart attacks, stroke, and intellectual decline with aging, 2) the metabolic syndrome is often preventable, and 3) the metabolic syndrome can be treated in all persons and eliminated in many people.

What are the consequences of having metabolic syndrome?

People with chronic metabolic syndrome have increased risks of heart attack, stroke, and intellectual loss overtime. The heart attack and stroke may be a direct consequence of high blood pressure and elevated lipids. The intellectual loss may result from blood vessel damage in the brain, poor pump function of the heart, or other consequences of the syndrome. People with metabolic syndrome may have high, increased levels of insulin because their body does not respond to this hormone properly. These high levels of insulin can be harmful to the brain. People with metabolic syndrome may also suffer from increased inflammation directed against the body's organs, including the brain. The cause of the enhanced inflammation is unknown, but this response may worsen brain damage produced by Alzheimer's disease or other brain injury.

What can I do to reduce the risk to my health and intellect produced by metabolic syndrome?

Exercise, weight control, and good primary health care are highly effective in reducing the risk for metabolic syndrome. Middle-aged persons should monitor their health status and reduce health risks.

Why is that spare tire so dangerous to my health?

Beltline obesity is frequently referred to as your “spare tire”. This mass of fatty tissue is mostly located inside the abdominal cavity in a shroud of fatty tissue that hangs like an apron from your rib cage. This sheet of tissue expands as a person becomes obese and contains cells that produce a wide range of hormones. This fatty tissue is extremely active in altering levels of blood sugar, fats, and other molecules involved with energy and obesity. Obesity changes many body functions that can damage blood vessels and the brain. Exercise and calorie restriction are the best ways to deflate that spare tire and protect your brain.

What can I do to prevent the metabolic syndrome?

There are many steps a person can take in middle life that may reduce the risk for metabolic syndrome in later life: 1) control your weight and deflate your spare tire, 2) check your blood pressure on a regular basis and take medications prescribed by your doctor to manage your blood pressure, 3) have your doctor check your cholesterol and triglycerides on a regular basis, 4) eat a sensible diet that is low in red meat and include two portions of fish per week, 5) if you have high cholesterol, take your medicine as prescribed by your doctor, and 6) exercise on a regular basis.