

Health Tips

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with

Dr. D



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Health Tip: What Waistlines Tell Us About Our Health

If the knowledge that a bulging waistline could increase your risk of developing diabetes or heart disease was not compelling enough to encourage weight reduction, perhaps newly published findings relating waist measurement to health status will get your attention. A new study has found that women with excess fat around their waists have a significantly increased risk of premature death than women with smaller waistlines. Another study has shown that those with bulging waistlines during middle age are much more likely to develop dementia or Alzheimer disease later in life.

Although the concept is not universally accepted by the medical community, it is currently believed that fat accumulating around the middle is considerably more dangerous than, for example, fat accumulating in the hip region.



Abdominal fat is largely "visceral fat", which is an indicator of similar fat being deposited around internal organs. Visceral fat appears to initiate changes in our cells and organs that ultimately results in conditions such as metabolic syndrome, heart disease and diabetes. This is where the concept of the "apple" vs. "pear" configuration of body type came about. In two individuals with similar weight and stature, the one with excessive abdominal fat (the "apple") is thought to carry additional health

risks as compared to the one with a more pear or hourglass shape.

In the study that looked at women's waistlines and overall mortality, those women with a waist size of 35 or more inches (measured at the naval line) were almost twice as likely to die prematurely as compared to women with waistlines less than 28 inches. Most of these premature deaths were due to heart disease or cancer. The Alzheimer's study looked at the health status of participants approximately 30 years after their initial waist measurements were made. The 40-something year olds who were both overweight and had excess abdominal fat when the initial measurement were made were more than 3 times more likely to develop dementia later in life than those with normal measurements. Even the study participants who were of a healthy weight but had a large belly on initial evaluation had twice the risk of developing dementia in their senior years.

In addition to achieving an optimal [body/mass index](#), women should try to achieve more of a "pear" or hourglass configuration than an "apple" shape. Men



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also need to take steps to stop waistline expansion in order to reduce their risk of developing diseases which severely affect their quality-of-life or that can result in premature death. The encouraging news is that the type of fat that collects around the abdominal region is somewhat easier to lose than in some other locations. Diet and exercise will go a long way toward getting rid of that "spare tire".



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