



Metabolic Syndrome

It's no secret that diabetes and heart disease are on the rise in the United States. But what you may not know is that many of the contributing factors in those diseases—obesity, high blood pressure, lipid imbalances, and blood sugar problems— together constitute their own health condition. This is referred to as metabolic syndrome or syndrome X. Nearly a third of American adults have it. After the age of 60, that figure jumps to half of the population.

Metabolic syndrome increases the risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease and it also may increase the likelihood of liver disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease.

Contributing Factors

A central factor in metabolic syndrome is insulin resistance. Taking a look at the causes of insulin resistance can help us figure out how to help prevent it. Here are some of the ways that insulin resistance can develop:

- Diets high in refined carbohydrates (namely white bread and white rice) and sugars
- Lack of micronutrients like chromium, magnesium, and vitamin D
- Exposure to environmental toxins, including trans fats found in processed baked goods, heavy metals, bisphenol A (BPA) found in some plastics, polychlorinated biphenyl exposure (PCBs) from landfill, and acrylamide – the largest source of which is French fries.
- Hormonal changes

It's common for doctors to overlook metabolic syndrome. Instead they just diagnose one or more of the components. If you've been diagnosed with high blood pressure, high fasting glucose levels, low HDL cholesterol, high triglycerides, or obesity, ask your doctor if you might have metabolic syndrome.

Treatment Options

The good news is that metabolic syndrome can largely be addressed through lifestyle and diet. Evidence shows that lifestyle changes are even more effective than medication in keeping metabolic syndrome from progressing.

Here are some of the most effective ways to address metabolic syndrome without drugs:

- Follow the Mediterranean diet. Researchers have compared a number of diets and found that the Mediterranean diet is better at improving metabolic syndrome than any of the others. The Mediterranean diet focuses on whole, plant-based foods. It includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and olive oil at every meal. Fish and seafood are on the menu three or more times per week. Moderate portions of poultry, eggs, cheese, and yogurt can be eaten daily. Meats and sweets should only be eaten occasionally. Wine is allowed in moderation.
- Exercise regularly. Daily movement is essential for people with metabolic syndrome. Not only does it help you lose weight, it also improves all the other components of the condition. Your integrative healthcare practitioner will help you to identify appropriate goals. Generally, it is helpful to aim for at least 5,000 steps a day plus 30 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise a day, and add resistance and flexibility exercises a couple times a week.
- Manage your stress. Chronic stress increases cortisol, which worsens insulin resistance and weight gain. Try yoga, meditation, or therapy to help manage your stress levels.
- Dietary supplements. Some dietary supplements, such as fish oil, vitamin D, magnesium, chromium and alpha lipoic acid can also help with metabolic syndrome. Your integrative healthcare practitioner will recommend supplements most suited to you.

A metabolic syndrome diagnosis can feel frightening. But it's also a powerful opportunity to take steps to make changes before you develop a life-threatening condition like heart disease or diabetes. You and your integrative health practitioner can work together to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce your risks and improve your health.