

Metabolic Syndrome: Your Risk for Chronic Disease



Metabolic syndrome is a condition that puts you at high risk for serious long-term (chronic) health problems. It's not a disease. You don't get symptoms. Instead, metabolic syndrome is when you have 3 or more out of 5 risk factors. You can take action to control these factors. This will help you lower your risk for chronic health problems. You will improve your health.



What is metabolic syndrome?

Metabolic syndrome is a group of risk factors. Having just 1 risk factor raises your chances for a health problem. Each extra risk factor raises your chances even more. These are things that your healthcare provider can measure. The risk factors are:

- Weight, especially around the waist (abdominal obesity)
- Level of fats (triglycerides) in the blood
- Level of HDL (good) cholesterol
- Blood pressure
- Blood sugar level

Talk with your healthcare provider about your numbers. Ask what they mean for you.

Metabolic syndrome and chronic disease

Studies show that metabolic syndrome is linked to many chronic health problems. These include heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. A person with metabolic syndrome is:

- 5 times more likely to have type 2 diabetes
- 2 times more likely to have heart disease
- 2 to 4 times more likely to have a stroke
- 3 to 4 times more likely to have a heart attack
- 5 times more likely to have mild problems with thinking (cognitive impairment)
- 2 times more likely to develop chronic kidney disease

Metabolic syndrome also doubles your risk of dying from any of these.

Metabolic syndrome and heart disease

If you have metabolic syndrome, it's more likely that arteries that send blood to your heart have become narrowed or blocked by fatty deposits called plaque. This lowers the amount of blood and oxygen that reaches the heart. This leads to chest pain (angina) or heart attack.

Metabolic syndrome and diabetes

One sign of metabolic syndrome is a higher level of sugar (glucose) in your blood. This can also be a sign of prediabetes. When you have prediabetes, your risk of having diabetes goes up. Diabetes is when your body can't make enough insulin. Or your body can't use insulin normally. Type 2 diabetes is a metabolic disorder.

Metabolic syndrome and stroke

Metabolic syndrome raises your risk for stroke. An ischemic stroke is when arteries that send blood to your brain get narrowed or blocked. A hemorrhagic stroke can occur with high blood pressure and diabetes. Over time, metabolic syndrome also raises your risk of mild cognitive impairment.

How is metabolic syndrome treated?

Because it raises the risk of more serious long-term (chronic) conditions, treatment is important. This focuses on managing the risk factors. It most often includes lifestyle changes. These changes focus on 3 major things:

- **Losing weight.** Every pound you lose is good for your body and your heart. Losing weight will help improve your cholesterol and triglyceride levels. It will lower your blood pressure. And it will improve your blood sugar level.
- **Eating more healthy foods.** Making smart food choices helps you get your cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar to better levels. Healthy choices also help you control your weight.
- **Being more active.** Being active is one of the best things you can do for your heart. When combined with eating right, activity helps you lose extra pounds. Being active helps to lower blood sugar and raises HDL levels.

It's also very important not to smoke. And your healthcare provider may prescribe medicines. These are to help you manage cholesterol, blood pressure, or blood sugar. Medicines work best when used with weight loss, healthier eating, and more activity. If you are prescribed medicines, know what you are taking. Take them as directed.

You can take action now to help lower your risk for chronic health conditions. Take charge of your future. Make changes to help protect your body and prevent serious problems.

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