

WHAT IS METABOLIC SYNDROME?

Metabolic syndrome is the name for a group of risk factors linked to overweight and obesity that increase your chance for heart disease and other health problems such as diabetes and stroke. The term “metabolic” refers to the biochemical processes involved in the body’s normal functioning. Risk factors are behaviors or conditions that increase your chance of getting a disease. The term “heart disease” refers to coronary heart disease.

The five conditions listed below are metabolic risk factors for heart disease. A person can develop any one of these risk factors by itself, but they tend to occur together. Metabolic syndrome is diagnosed when a person has at least three of these heart disease risk factors:

- A large waistline. This is also called abdominal obesity or “having an apple shape.” Excess fat in the abdominal area is a greater risk factor for heart disease than excess fat in other parts of the body, such as on the hips.
- A higher than normal triglyceride level in the blood (or you’re on medicine to treat high triglycerides). Triglycerides are a type of fat found in the blood.
- A lower than normal level of HDL cholesterol (high-density lipoprotein cholesterol) in the blood (or you’re on medicine to treat low HDL). HDL is considered “good” cholesterol because it lowers your chances of heart disease. Low levels of HDL increase your chances of heart disease.
- Higher than normal blood pressure (or you’re on medicine to treat high blood pressure). Blood pressure is recorded as two numbers, usually written one on top of or before the other, such as 120/80. The top or first number, called the systolic blood pressure, measures the pressure in the bloodstream when your heart beats. The bottom or second number, called the diastolic blood pressure, measures the pressure in your bloodstream between heartbeats when the heart is relaxed.
- Higher than normal fasting blood sugar (glucose) (or you’re on medicine to treat high blood sugar). Mildly high blood sugar can be an early warning sign of diabetes.

The more of these risk factors you have, the greater your chance of developing heart disease, diabetes, or a stroke. In general, a person with metabolic syndrome is twice as likely to develop heart disease and five times as likely to develop diabetes as someone without metabolic syndrome.

(National Heart Blood and Lung Institute - April 2007)