

Metabolic Syndrome: What Is It?



Metabolic Syndrome identifies individuals at risk for heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. It is estimated that 27% of adults have Metabolic Syndrome. The main indicators of Metabolic Syndrome are insulin resistance, high blood pressure, cholesterol abnormalities, and an increased risk for clotting of the blood. Patients are most often overweight or obese. A person is defined as

having Metabolic Syndrome if they have three or more of the following risk factors:

- Abdominal obesity: a measurement of 40 inches or more around the waist of a man or over 35 inches around on a woman
- High triglycerides: a high triglyceride level is 150 mg/dl or above
- Low levels of HDL (high-density lipoproteins or "good" cholesterol): a low HDL level is 40 mg/dl or lower in men and 50 mg/dl or lower in women
- High blood pressure: 130/85 or higher
- High fasting blood glucose: 110 mg/dl or above

What Causes Metabolic Syndrome?

Metabolic Syndrome is influenced by both genetics and lifestyle. A person with a family history of early heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure has a much higher risk of developing Metabolic Syndrome. Risk is also increased if a person's job requires sitting for long periods of time, they participate in little physical activity, they smoke, their diet contains excessive levels of carbohydrates, or if they are a post-menopausal woman.

How Are Metabolic Syndrome and Obesity Linked?

Obesity is a risk factor for Metabolic Syndrome because being overweight raises blood pressure and triglycerides, lowers good cholesterol, and contributes to insulin resistance. The presence of excess fat around the abdomen raises the risk of Metabolic Syndrome.

Consequences of Metabolic Syndrome

A person with Metabolic Syndrome has approximately twice the risk for heart disease and five times the risk for Type 2 diabetes. Another consequence of Metabolic Syndrome is fat accumulation in the liver, resulting in inflammation and the potential for cirrhosis (irreversible scarring of the liver). Other medical problems associated with Metabolic Syndrome include sleep apnea, polycystic ovary syndrome, an increased risk of dementia in old age, and the possibility of kidney damage.

Treatment

Since the genetic factors of the syndrome cannot be changed, treatment focuses on the influences of a person's lifestyle. Quitting smoking, limiting alcohol consumption, and striving to eat a healthy balanced diet are all ways to positively impact Metabolic Syndrome. An overweight or obese individual will benefit from continuing to work at losing a few more pounds. A gradual increase in the amount of physical activity done each day (with a goal of reaching 30 minutes/day) will aid in a healthier body as well. A physician may recommend taking prescriptions for conditions such as high blood pressure or low HDL cholesterol.

For more information, visit the following websites:

http://www.medicinenet.com/metabolic_syndrome/article.htm
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/ms/ms_whatis.html