

## Abdominal Fat in Women May Increase Stroke Risk

According to the most recent federal health survey, abdominal obesity is responsible for triple the amount of strokes in women ages 35 to 54. The same study indicates that women's waistlines are nearly two inches larger than they were a decade ago.

Traditionally, middle age men have had higher risk factors for stroke than women, but these new studies indicate that abdominal obesity is a stronger risk factor for women than men.

The sharp increase in strokes for women has been attributed to obesity and carrying excess belly or "visceral" fat. While people recognize that excess fat is unhealthy, the key is where fat is distributed within the body. People with apple-shaped bodies (heaviest in the abdomen) are at greater risk of stroke, diabetes, and heart disease than those with pear shapes (heaviest in the hips, buttocks, and thighs). Fat plays a role in producing the chemicals that cause inflammation throughout the body and also within the blood vessels. Chronic inflammation is a key player in many health problems, including stroke, diabetes, and heart disease.

### Recognizing Stroke Symptoms

All of the major symptoms of a stroke appear suddenly. Often there is more than one symptom at the same time. The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke notes these major signs:

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arms, or legs
- Sudden confusion or trouble speaking or understanding others
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, or loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden severe headache with no known cause

### A Stroke Is an Emergency!

Call 911 immediately should any of the above symptoms occur. Treatment can be more effective if administered early on. Every minute counts. If symptoms occur for a very short period of time and then disappear, it could mean a Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA). A person who has suffered a TIA (also called a "warning stroke" or a "mini-stroke") should still call 911 even though their symptoms have subsided. This is because they are at a higher risk to suffer a full-blown stroke at a later time. Emergency medical treatment can save a life and greatly improve changes for successful rehabilitation and recovery.



## Abdominal Fat in Women May Increase Stroke Risk, cont.

### What's the Solution?

The best way to lose abdominal fat is to eat right and exercise regularly. Follow these guidelines for diet and exercise:



- Use up (with physical activity) at least as many calories as taken in during eating.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes daily. Aerobic exercise and weight training are especially beneficial. Try hiking, biking, circuit training with weight resistance, or an aerobic exercise class.
- Eat a diet rich in whole-grain, high-fiber foods. Examples are 7-grain bread, whole-grain cereal, whole-wheat pastas, brown rice, buckwheat, spelt, and wild rice.
- Eat fish at least twice a week. Fish is an excellent source of Omega-3s (the good fats).
- Limit intake of saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol. Avoid processed foods, whole-fat dairy products, and high-fat meats.
- Cut back on beverages and foods high in calories and low in nutrition, such as soft drinks or foods with added sugar.
- Choose foods with little or no salt and prepare foods without adding any more salt. Salt can raise blood pressure, which is also a risk factor for strokes.



**For more information see the following websites:**

[www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org)  
<http://www.diabetes.org/diabetes-research/summaries/tanne-bodyfat.jsp>