Metabolic syndrome is an obesity-related condition that is commonly overlooked by healthcare providers. Because of this, those who have metabolic syndrome might not even know about it.

What is Metabolic Syndrome?

Metabolic syndrome is a group of weight-related health conditions (high blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat, high cholesterol levels) that increase your risk for:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- Certain types of cancers (liver, bladder, colon, etc.)

Why is Metabolic Syndrome Dangerous?

Metabolic Syndrome has been called the ‘new silent killer’ by scientists when comparing it to the high blood pressure crisis of the 1970s. Up to one-third of the global population has metabolic syndrome and it is often overlooked in clinical settings. Healthcare providers usually evaluate each risk factor individually.

Obesity, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes all cause significant damage to the body. All together, they are an extremely dangerous combination. Since it is generally under-screened and underdiagnosed, many people are unaware that they have metabolic syndrome – nor are they informed of the long-term negative health consequences of having it. The first step toward overall wellbeing and managing metabolic syndrome is to inform yourself about how it can affect your body and understand the potential negative effects on your health.

How Common is Metabolic Syndrome?

Approximately 32% of the U.S. population has metabolic syndrome. The prevalence of metabolic syndrome increases to approximately 60% - 75% in people with obesity and 85% in people with a chronic disease such as type 2 diabetes. The prevalence of metabolic syndrome also increases with age, with 40% of people affected being over the age of 60.

Weight loss and intensive lifestyle behavioral therapy are effective treatments in curbing the onset of metabolic syndrome.
How is Metabolic Syndrome Diagnosed?

Metabolic syndrome is diagnosed after a physical exam and several blood tests that screen for blood sugar, cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Particularly, a diagnosis of metabolic syndrome is made if a person has three or more of the following risk factors:

- **Abdominal obesity (excess weight around the belly),** defined as a waist circumference of greater than 40 inches in males and greater than 35 inches in females

- **Triglyceride levels of 150 mg/dL or above.** These are types of fat found in your blood.

- **HDL (good) cholesterol (40 mg/dL or lower in males; 50 mg/dL or lower in females),** which helps remove other forms of cholesterol from the bloodstream

- **Blood pressure of 130/85 mm HG or greater**

- **Fasting blood glucose levels of 100 mg/dL or above,** which measure how much glucose is in a blood sample after an overnight fast

Who is at Risk?

People with one or more of the following characteristics have been shown to have an increased risk of developing metabolic syndrome:

- Obesity
- Type 2 diabetes or a family history of type 2 diabetes
- Tobacco smokers
- Chronic drug or alcohol abuse
- Females with a history of polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)
- Mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder and depression

What Are Some Complications Associated with Metabolic Syndrome?

Once someone develops metabolic syndrome, there are many problems that can follow. Metabolic syndrome doubles the risk of developing blood vessel and heart disease, which can then lead to heart attacks and strokes. Additionally, people with metabolic syndrome also have an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes which is associated with complications of the eyes, nerves and kidneys.

How Can You Combat Metabolic Syndrome?

Many obesity-related chronic diseases, such as metabolic syndrome, share similar underlying causes. This makes them preventable and, in many instances, reversible through intensive lifestyle behavioral changes such as weight loss and diet.

In a study published in 2019 in the Journal of Public Health, researchers found that approximately one in two patients with obesity who attended a non-surgical medical weight management program had metabolic syndrome. Weight loss and intensive lifestyle behavioral therapy are effective treatments in curbing the onset of metabolic syndrome. In fact, the results of the study found that the prevalence of metabolic syndrome was reduced by about 45% in the first three months of program participation and by 73% in one year. Weight loss was associated with improvements in waist circumference, triglyceride levels, HDL cholesterol levels and blood pressure at 52 weeks.

Your Healthcare Provider Can Help!

Your healthcare provider can develop a treatment plan that is unique to your needs and based on your individual risk factors. If possible, seek help from an obesity medicine specialist or enroll in a medically supervised weight management program that offers evidence-based strategies. The goal of treatment for metabolic syndrome will focus on reducing or eliminating underlying problems such as obesity and limited physical activity. It is important to recognize that metabolic syndrome can be prevented or reversed through proper lifestyle changes and choices, including:

- Regular exercise
- Weight loss
- Healthy and balanced eating

Take charge of your health and speak with your healthcare provider about metabolic syndrome.

About the Author:
Macklin E. Guzmán, DHSc, MPH, is the Chief Science Officer at Medi-Weightloss®. Dr. Guzmán is an epidemiologist, clinical scientist and global health expert with professional and research experience in infectious and chronic disease epidemiology, public health, and clinical research.
The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education
- Community Blogs
- Community Discussion Forum
- Ongoing Support
- Meaningful Connections

AND MUCH MORE

JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

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