

Visceral fat

Visceral fat is different from other body fat. Also called intra-abdominal fat, visceral fat refers to fat surrounding the internal organs. Subcutaneous fat, on the other hand, is body fat that is close to the skin's surface and is considered less dangerous, and easier to lose, than visceral fat.

Studies have shown that those with visceral fat are more susceptible to heart disease, stroke, diabetes and hypertension and may have a higher risk of dementia later in life. Sedentary people, smokers and drinkers have been shown to have more intra-abdominal fat, or visceral fat, than active non-smokers and non-drinkers. Stress may also be a factor in the storage of visceral fat on the body.

Visceral fat is harder to lose than subcutaneous fat because it is embedded deeply in the body's tissues. It can only be measured accurately by an imaging machine that can see in to the abdomen. A person may be within a healthy weight range, but still have too much fat around their internal organs. Waist circumference is a good indicator of a person's visceral fat.

The liver metabolises visceral fat and releases it in to the bloodstream as cholesterol. Harmful, or "bad" cholesterol, otherwise known as low-density lipoprotein (LDL), builds up into a plaque that blocks the arteries. Losing weight through proper diet and effective exercise can help reduce visceral fat. How much fat a person eats does matter, as studies have shown that those who eat 30% or more of their diets as fat usually have high amounts of visceral fat.

Exercise is a very effective way of targeting weight loss at visceral fat. Weight-bearing exercise like walking is considered by many health and fitness experts to be a much better way of helping to control visceral fat than by doing exercises such as swimming, where gravity keeps the body afloat. Walking at a fairly fast pace for half an hour, six days a week has been shown to help and walking only three days a week does not have much effect, while doing no exercise at all actually increases the amount of visceral fat in the body.

How can I reduce my visceral fat?

If you have a raised waist circumference, you are likely to have too much visceral fat.

Take steps now to reduce your waist circumference, with or without losing weight. You should do this through a combination of diet and exercise.

- Eat a healthy diet that is low in fat, and avoid saturated fats.
- If you are overweight, eat smaller portions.
- Be more active every day and reduce the amount of time you spend in sedentary pastimes such as watching television.
- If you do not already take exercise, you should consider starting. Choose a form that is weight bearing and that you enjoy and will be able to do regularly.
- Aim to do at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise on five or more days of the week. You can break it up into smaller chunks of 15 minutes if this is more convenient.
- You should exercise at a level that makes you warm and slightly out of breath.

References

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