



Decoding *body fat*

*The hidden truth behind
your health*

Not all fat is created *equal*...

No matter how fit you are, having some fat on your body is normal and healthy. Fat is stored all over the human body, but not all fat is created equal. Your health can be impacted in different ways depending on where those fat deposits are stored.

Subcutaneous fat, for example, is generally stored just beneath the skin, such as the jiggly part of an underarm. It can be pinched with your fingers. The inability to see your six-pack of abs is really an issue of either too small rectus abdominis muscle group and/or too much subcutaneous fat surrounding these muscles.

Visceral fat on the other hand, lies deep within the abdominal walls and surrounds the organs. Located behind the abdominal muscles, visceral fat surrounds stomach, liver, intestines, and other important organs, but cannot be seen. Visceral fat is associated with health risks.

In an ideal world, rather than tracking our body fat percentage, we would instead track what percentage of our fat was visceral fat.

Although there are no standard reference ranges for visceral fat, in healthy individuals, values are generally less than 1 kg for younger individuals and between 1-2 kg for older individuals. However, these are approximations.



Simple ways to determine *visceral fat*



Hip to waist ratio

Use a tape measure to find out the size of your waist and your hips, then divide your waist size by your hip size. A ratio of more than 0.85 in women and 0.90 in men may suggest you have more fat in your belly than is healthy, including visceral fat.

Body Shape

Look in the mirror. Where your body tends to store fat can offer you a clue. If you're an apple – a big trunk and slimmer legs – it often can mean more visceral fat. This body shape is more common among men. Research shows that upper body fat comes with more health risks, which might be a contributing reason why women usually live longer than men.

A poor diet with a high intake of processed foods and carbohydrates (sugars) and an inactive lifestyle provide the building blocks for an increase in visceral fat. However, stress is a factor too. Stress activates a hormone in your body called cortisol.

The good news is making changes to your activity levels, diet and lifestyle can be effective strategies for slimming that stomach, especially in the places that matter! If you are considering a significant change in diet, please consult your GP to ensure you do so without risk to health.

CONTENT CREATED BY HCA NUTRITIONAL THERAPY TEAM

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Lose weight or *lose* *up to 13 years!*

We hear it all the time...lose weight for your health. Few people however, realise the extent to which this is critical to their physical well-being and ultimately their life expectancy.

A 2023 study from the Obesity Medicine Association highlights the severe impact of obesity on overall health and longevity. The study reports that obesity significantly reduces life expectancy due to its association with various chronic conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. These conditions contribute to at least 2.8 million deaths annually worldwide ([Obesity Medicine Association](#)) ([PLOS](#)). An analysis conducted by the University of Oxford found that severe obesity can reduce life expectancy by about 13 years. This reduction is comparable to the effects of lifelong smoking.

It is now well researched that a Western diet that leads to obesity may actually act to stimulate the growth of cancer cells. It is never too late to improve your health through healthful eating and adopting a more health-giving lifestyle.





10 ways to reduce visceral / belly fat healthily

1. Be Active

Exercise can help you shed both types of fat. If you lose weight through diet, exercise can help you keep it off. Every bit helps. Go for walks after dinner. Take the stairs. Bike instead of drive. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity activity most days of the week. A combination of aerobic and strength training is the most effective plan for trimming stubborn belly fat.

It's also important to keep and to build your muscles. Work out with weights, do resistance training like push-ups and sit-ups, or practice yoga for strength and mindfulness.

2. Reduce your carbs

Proven to be more useful than a low-fat diet, reducing your carb intake has to be a first-line strategy for getting your waist in order. Balancing your blood sugar levels, reducing your intake of high GI foods and opting for low GI carbs will keep you fuller for longer and help you meet your waist-whittling goals.

3. Fill up on Fibre

Fibre may not feature high on your list of favourite foods, but fibrous foods should be top of your list for amazing health benefits. Soluble fibre found in plant foods like flaxseeds and avocado, are especially useful for keeping your appetite in check, your gut in good health and for reducing abdominal fat.

4. Pack in the protein

Research shows us that people who eat more protein have lower visceral fat levels. Aim to include lean sources of protein in each meal and snack, such as seafood, organic meats, eggs, dairy, beans and pulses.

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5. Eat calcium and Vit D rich foods

Calcium and vitamin D, two nutrients we typically associate with bone health, may be linked to less visceral fat. Researchers think these nutrients play an important role in how the body metabolises fat. So include leafy greens like broccoli and spinach. Tofu and sardines are also good picks, as are dairy foods like yogurt and cheese.

Avoid deep-fried or processed foods; sodas, candy, processed baked goods. Foods sweetened with fructose should only be enjoyed in moderation. Read the labels and avoid ingredients like "partially hydrogenated oils" or "high-fructose corn syrup." These deplete your body of the nutrients you're trying to increase and convert to fat quickly.

6. Get quality sleep

Getting the right amount of sleep is crucial for managing belly fat. As an adult, you should aim for seven to nine hours per night.

7. Beverages

Alcohol in moderation is okay. Drinking too much may cause you to gain visceral fat. When it comes to alcohol, the frequency of consumption should also be considered. Research suggests the pattern of our drinking plays an important role. Binge drinking; having four or more drinks in one sitting may be at greater risk of visceral fat accumulation than those who have one small glass a day.



TOP TIP

Avoid liquid sugars, such as fruit juice, fizzy drinks, some nut milks, energy drinks, sugary coffee/tea. Liquid sugars accelerates the development of belly fat by being quickly absorbed in the body and cause a spike in insulin.



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8. Choose an eating window

What you eat is not the only way to successfully beat that belly fat. Choosing when you eat may also be an effective method. Intermittent fasting involves cycling between periods of eating and fasting. This pattern of eating may have other benefits such as improving hunger signalling and insulin sensitivity.

The key to success is to select a time period that suits your lifestyle. Avoid eating too late in the evening because this can disrupt sleep. Aim for at least 12 hours between your last and first meal of the day.

9. Quit smoking

Smoking promotes the storage of fat around the abdomen so a sure-fire win is to quit smoking.

10. Manage stress

Fibre may not feature high on your list of favourite foods, but fibrous foods should be top of your list for amazing health benefits. Soluble fibre found in plant foods like flaxseeds and avocado, are especially useful for keeping your appetite in check, your gut in good health and for reducing abdominal fat.

Chronic stress has become an epidemic in our society where we often believe that faster is better and we try to pack as many obligations into our ever-expanding schedules.

During chronic stress, insulin increases and your body releases hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones flood your system, raising your heart rate, increasing your blood pressure, making your blood more likely to clot, damaging your brain's memory centre, increasing belly fat storage and generally wreaking havoc on your body. Moderating stress is key to successfully managing your waistline. What works for you will be personal to you, so check out a variety of methods.

A person with a backpack is jumping joyfully in a forest. The person is wearing a dark jacket, blue jeans, and sneakers. Their arms are outstretched, and they appear to be in mid-air. The background is a lush green forest with tall trees and some purple flowers in the foreground.

Simple steps to *get started*

Here are simple steps to follow which can make an immediate improvement to your health and vitality.

Match your diet to your body's requirements.

If you eat and drink more than your body requires you will put on weight. Make recipes leaner, and eat infrequently from fast food restaurants. Also learn how to snack with healthful choices.

Colour your diet with a large variety of colourful, cancer-fighting fruit and vegetables.

There are seven different colour ranges of both fruit and vegetables and by choosing between 5 to 9 daily serves from a wide range of fruit and vegetables, we are extending our consumption of cancer (and other disease) fighting nutrients.

Rev up your metabolism with activity.

If you want to enjoy a lifetime of well being, exercise is a key ingredient. Thirty minutes activity each day that takes as much effort as a brisk walk is recommended for adults. Children should be active for an hour each day.

GET SUPPORT TO ENSURE YOU DEVELOP *HEALTHY* *HABITS* REACH AND ATTAIN YOUR GOALS.

A Healthier Way to Work

A study, "Effects of Internet Behavioural Counselling on Weight Loss in Adults at Risk of Type 2 Diabetes" shows that participants who had the support of weight loss coaching lost more weight than those who didn't. The study concluded that the support of a weight loss coach can significantly improve weight loss results.

Being overweight or obese has been identified next to smoking, as the most preventable major risk to developing cancer. Even small weight losses have been shown to have beneficial health effects. So it's never too late to start and you can never be too young or too old to be concerned about your health and do something about achieving a more healthy weight.

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