

Men and Belly Fat: No Laughing Matter

Dad bod. Beer belly. Spare tire. Men's protruding potbellies have long had pet names and served as the butt—so to speak—of late-night jokes.

But the health effects of extra fat in the abdomen, also called visceral fat, are serious. Men who pack more pudge around their middles have a greater risk for:



- Heart failure
- A dangerous type of irregular heartbeat called atrial fibrillation
- Cardiovascular disease
- Type 2 diabetes and a related condition, insulin resistance
- Cancer
- Dementia
- An early death

Some of these effects can occur even in men who don't technically qualify as overweight or obese by measures such as body mass index (BMI).

For Fat, Location Matters

Why does it make a difference where men's flab collects? For one thing, fat in the abdomen is positioned closer to vital organs. Sometimes, it can be deposited directly within them.

All fat secretes hormones that can trigger health problems. But belly fat seems more active than the type that gathers elsewhere.

Some lab tests can measure belly fat. But you can easily check it on your own by measuring your waist. While standing, wrap a measuring tape just above your hipbones. Exhale, then check the number. For men, a waist that's greater than 40 inches could raise health risks.

Sources include the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases; the American Academy of Family Physicians and the National Cancer Institute.

Get a Handle on Your Girth

The same methods that promote weight loss overall—eating better and moving more—banish belly fat, too. But paying special attention to these strategies may help slim down your midsection specifically:

- **Cut back on booze.** Greater alcohol consumption may lead to a bigger gut. Limit drinking to two beverages per day if you're age 64 or younger, and one daily drink if you're older.
- **Sit less.** In one large study, sedentary behavior was linked to larger waists. Break up time at your desk or on the couch by moving once per hour.
- **Crank up your workouts.** Any physical activity can zap fat. But some research suggests high-intensity interval training works best against belly fat. These sessions alternate short bursts of hard efforts with periods of rest. If you have heart problems or a chronic disease, talk with your health care provider before starting an exercise program.

