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Heart
Health

Your Health: BMI and Waist Circumference

How much should you weigh to help prevent heart disease and other serious conditions? Body weight actually matters less than body fat for health protection. In particular, coronary and artery disease as well as excess abdominal fat may increase your risk for type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.

We have 2 standards for measuring excess body fat in relation to health.

❶ **Body Mass Index or BMI** — Your health care provider typically will check your weight and height at each office visit to identify BMI. Weight that is higher than what is considered healthy for a given height is considered overweight or obese.

BMI is only an estimate calculation of total body fat without regard for the individual's muscle weight or the location of fat. For example, abdominal fat (i.e., belly fat) is considered more harmful than fat in the hips and thighs.

❷ **Waist circumference** — This measures abdominal fat and provides an independent prediction of risk over and above that of BMI. Your waistline may say your health is at risk if you are:

➢ A man with a waist larger than 40 inches.
➢ A woman (nonpregnant) with a waist larger than 35 inches.

Measure your waist carefully:
Place a tape measure around your middle, just above your hipbones. Keep the tape evenly horizontal all the way around, without compressing the skin.

Your BMI reflects total body fatness, while waist measure is the best estimate of abdominal fat and obesity-related diseases, such as heart ailments. To fully evaluate your individual health status and risks, your provider will want to perform necessary health assessments that also include other factors besides weight and body fat location.

February 7 is Wear Red Day. It honors women's heart health. Heart disease kills more women than all forms of cancer combined. Most women who die suddenly from heart disease will have no prior symptoms. But 80% of cardiac events may be prevented with health education and lifestyle changes to manage your vital signs.

Matters of the Heart

Each year, more than 600,000 Americans die from heart disease (also called cardiovascular disease). This number has declined somewhat in recent years, but heart disease remains our leading health problem, causing 1 out of every 3 deaths in the U.S.

But what is heart disease? Cardiovascular disease is any disorder that affects the structure and function of your heart. Some of the most common conditions are:

✓ abnormal heartbeat (arrhythmia).

✓ coronary artery disease (atherosclerosis or plaque buildup in the arteries).

✓ heart failure (disorder of the heart pump).

✓ heart valve disease (such as mitral valve prolapse or aortic stenosis).

✓ congenital heart disease (blood vessel defect).

✓ heart muscle disease (cardiomyopathy).

✓ those caused by high blood pressure (hypertension).

Heart disease is our No. 1 health enemy. Medicine, technology and education do a good job of preventing, treating the symptoms and repairing the damage of sick hearts, and millions survive heart disease and heart attacks very well.

However, there's no magic bullet cure for heart ailments. Heart health begins with you.

Foods Your Heart Loves

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

What do salmon, berries, leafy greens and nuts have in common? They are all heart-smart foods that ably nourish the body and help combat unhealthy cholesterol, hypertension and heart disease. But it's not just a single food in isolation that can help protect your heart. Rather, it's a combination of nourishing foods and a consistent pattern of healthy eating that has the greatest impact.

Studies show that 2 dietary patterns are particularly helpful for heart health: the Mediterranean Diet and the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) Diet. Both eating patterns are chock-full of vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, fish, poultry and low-fat dairy, and recommend reducing the consumption of red meat, sweets and salty snacks.

Both eating plans emphasize whole, unprocessed foods instead of ultra-processed foods, such as processed meats and cheeses as well as refined breads and other carbs. So, preferably choose apples and carrots rather than apple pie and carrot cake.

Why are these food plans so powerful for heart health? Together, these foods provide fiber, which helps regulate blood pressure and cholesterol levels; antioxidants to reduce inflammation; and a host of cardio-protective vitamins and minerals essential for good health. This approach is also lower in sodium, sugars and trans fat, which may raise your risk of heart disease when eaten in excess.

How does **cardiac arrest** differ from a **heart attack**?

It's an important distinction:

A heart attack occurs when the coronary arteries can't supply enough blood.

1. It's also called myocardial infarction, and it can cause permanent damage to the heart muscle, and death.

2. Symptoms may include chest pain or pressure, shortness of breath or nausea. Some heart attacks are sudden and intense, but most start slowly, with mild symptoms.

3. Medical conditions leading to heart attack include: plaque buildup in the arteries (atherosclerosis); heart muscle or valve disorder; high blood pressure or abnormal heartbeat (arrhythmia).

Cardiac arrest occurs when the heart suddenly stops pumping blood.

1. It usually happens when the ventricles in the lower or upper heart chambers beat too fast, failing to exchange blood properly between heartbeats; the ventricles fill with blood and can't continue normal pumping to sustain life.

2. A person in cardiac arrest may quickly lose consciousness and have no pulse, and die without emergency treatment. Fainting is usually the first sign of cardiac arrest.

3. Common causes include: arterial disease, viral infections of the heart, inherited disorders, obesity, smoking and heavy alcohol use.