

Why Waist Circumference Matters

Almost everyone knows how tall they are and most have an idea of their weight. But do you know your waist circumference and why it matters?

Are You an Apple or a Pear?

You may have heard about apple- or pear-shaped bodies. This describes where you carry your abdominal weight: either around your abdomen (apple-shaped) or around your hips and thighs (pear-shaped). Studies show that those with larger waist sizes have a higher risk of developing health conditions than those with smaller waists, regardless of their body mass index (BMI). Some of these health conditions that can arise from too much stomach fat can include type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

How to Measure

There is some debate among researchers as to whether measuring waist circumference alone or calculating a waist-hip ratio is best in determining the associated health risks. However, measuring waist circumference is simpler and more commonly practiced.

To find your waist circumference, you will need a flexible tape measure or a piece of string.

- Stand with your back straight and your feet at shoulder width apart.
- Starting on the side of your body, bring the tape measure all the way around, staying level with your belly button.
- Keep the tape measure flat and parallel to the floor.
- Once you have the tape measure in place, take two breaths. After exhaling the second time, tighten the tape measure slightly. Be sure that it is snug but not digging into your skin.
- Round the number to the nearest one-quarter inch (.5 centimeters) for your number.
- For most accurate results, be sure to measure underneath your clothing.

What's the Number Mean?

The CDC states that you may have increased health risks if:

- you are an adult male with a waist circumference greater than 40 inches (102 centimeters).
- you are a non-pregnant adult female with a waist circumference greater than 35 inches (88 centimeters).

However, the International Diabetes Federation has a lower cut-off point for risks associated with abdominal fat. It believes you may be at risk if:

- you are an adult male with a waist circumference greater than 35.5 inches (90 centimeters).
- you are an adult female with a waist circumference greater than 31.5 inches (80 centimeters).

How To Change Your Waist Circumference

Unfortunately, there is no one way to target certain areas of your body when it comes to changing your shape. The good news is that healthy eating and regular activity can help you lose inches and improve your overall health, as well as help with your mood, stress, and energy levels.