

Tighten your belt a couple of notches or else

VIBE REPORTER

IT was originally defined as Reaven's Syndrome. Others called it Metabolic Syndrome X, Cardiovascular (Dys)metabolic Syndrome, and Insulin Resistance Syndrome.

The ever practical Australians have simply christened it Beer-Gut Syndrome. Whatever the name, medical science is alerting people to the dangers of Metabolic Syndrome, which escalates your risk of contracting heart disease or diabetes and will significantly affect your quality of life if not lead to your early demise.

Metabolic Syndrome is described as an ominous combination of related abnormalities that increase an individual's risk of contracting cardiovascular diseases (CVD), especially heart disease. As scientists learn more, additional factors are being discovered to be part of the Metabolic Syndrome mix.

However, according to Dr Stan Zail, a member of the National Pathology Group (NPG), the primary risk factors are central (abdominal) obesity, insulin resistance, high blood pressure, cholesterol problems, especially low levels of HDL, the good cholesterol, and elevated triglyceride levels.

"You're potentially at risk if you have three or more of the five criteria of Metabolic Syndrome," said Dr Zail.

THE DANGER SIGNS

- A waist circumference of more than 102 cm (men) or 88 cm (women);
- Blood pressure around or above 130/85 mmHg;
- HDL cholesterol of less than 1 mmol/l

(men) or 1,3 mmol/l (women);

- A triglyceride count = 1,7 mmol/L;
- Glucose fasting level = 6 mmol/L.

The combined risk of these factors escalates above their cumulative effect. And Metabolic Syndrome puts you at increased risk of CVD at any given LDL (bad cholesterol) level.

In the US, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention have indicated that due to a striking increase in calorie intake and an accompanying decrease in physical activity among normal citizens, nearly two-thirds of American adults are overweight (BMI >25*) and more than 30% are frankly obese (BMI >30*).

Eight percent of American adults are diabetic, and 24% – or 47-million people – have Metabolic Syndrome.

Ultimately, it's a weighty issue. The risk of death from all causes among adults with severe obesity is twice that among moderately obese adults. Slim down your waist line and you could save your own life without having to depend on interventions such as triple bypasses, mechanical hearts or daily insulin injections.

Anyone who is overweight or obese is at risk, but experts point out that men in the 35 – 65 age bracket are the most vulnerable to CVD. Metabolic Syndrome was present in a small percentage of normal weight men (<5%), but the rate soared to 22% – 60% in overweight men.

Comparable levels were found amongst overweight and obese women.

MANAGEMENT OF

METABOLIC SYNDROME

1) Reduce the underlying causes, especially obesity, through diet and exercise.

2) Treat the associated non-lipid and lipid risk factors (high blood pressure, elevated triglycerides, high LDL cholesterol and low HDL cholesterol).

This may require medication although blood pressure, in particular, will usually come down on its own if you lose weight.

Although most medical practitioners would agree that a sensible, slow-but-steady approach to weight loss is best, they do offer a few diet tips:

- Concentrate on reducing your fat intake
- Go easy on the carbs. While you should not cut out carbohydrates (bread, pasta, potatoes, rice etc) altogether, several US studies have indicated that an excessive intake of carbohydrates is associated with raised triglyceride levels

- Stop smoking
- Drink alcohol in moderation if at all (two glasses of wine or the equivalent per night, maximum).

* BMI = body mass index. To calculate your BMI, divide your weight in kilograms by your height in metres squared. A healthy BMI is 18.5 – 25, overweight = 25 – 30, obese = 30+.



ACCORDING to Dr Stan Zail, a member of the National Pathology Group, one of the primary causes of Metabolic Syndrome is central (abdominal) obesity.