Metabolic Syndrome: What is it?

Other names it is called:
Syndrome X, metabolic syndrome X, insulin resistance syndrome

What is the metabolic syndrome?
It is a combination of health factors that can increase a person’s risk of heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

What are the signs of metabolic syndrome?
A person may have metabolic syndrome if they have three or more of the following:
• Waist size greater than 40 inches in men; greater than 35 inches in women (“beer belly”, pot belly, “apple” body pattern)
• Triglycerides greater than 150mg/dL
• HDL cholesterol (good cholesterol) less than 40mg/dL in men; less than 50mg/dL in women
• Fasting blood sugar greater than or equal to 100mg/dL
• Blood pressure greater than 130mm systolic (top number) or greater than 85mm diastolic (bottom number)

How is the metabolic syndrome diagnosed?
Recognizing the health problems noted above is how metabolic syndrome is diagnosed. If one of the signs noted above is found, the other signs should be looked for.

What if I have metabolic syndrome?
Having metabolic syndrome can greatly increase your risk of heart disease (4 to 20 times higher risk to those who don’t have it). It also greatly increases your risk of having diabetes or a stroke. Being overweight, increased levels of insulin and a decreased ability for the body to use its own insulin (insulin resistance) all can lead to other serious health problems, such as diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. A person with metabolic syndrome also may have abnormal blood clotting.

How is metabolic syndrome treated?
Diet and exercise is the best way to treat metabolic syndrome. Weight loss (even as little as 5 pounds) can help the body use its own insulin better. A registered dietitian can be very helpful in developing a meal plan. Physical activity/aerobic exercise for 20 minutes per day on most days also can help the body use insulin better.

Are medications ever needed to treat metabolic syndrome?
In addition to diet and exercise, medication can sometimes be helpful in treating some of the signs.

Is metabolic syndrome common?
A large study found that more than 47 million American adults have the metabolic syndrome. It affects from 6.7% of those in their twenties to 43.5% of those in their sixties.

If you have questions or need more information on metabolic syndrome, please talk with your health care provider.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.