

Is Your Belly Fat Killing You?

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In your quest to lose weight and get rid of your own unattractive belly fat, you may have a tendency to people watch and notice others who are overweight. Maybe it's because you can sympathize with how they're feeling and how they look – tired!

Even the act of walking is a monumental effort, especially in the summer months of the year when the heat works to drain a body.

Sitting in your car at the grocery store, you can study people. Start paying attention to how many of the people in the crowd are overweight versus those who aren't. The numbers will shock you.

Don't even measure how many are just a little overweight, but count how many are very noticeably overweight. There will be men, women and some kids who are carrying excess belly fat. Some people will make fun of them, too.

Belly fat has quite a few nicknames. Jelly Belly. Muffin Top. Spare Tire. Santa Belly. Beer Belly. We've heard the derogatory terms and know exactly what they mean. Sometimes, we try to give belly fat kinder, gentler names.

Some doctors even refer to belly fat as the apple shape, which doesn't sound all that bad. But whether derogatory or a softer label, they all mean the same thing - too much fat around the middle of the body that either sticks out noticeably or flops down over our belts.

For many of us, gaining that spare tire isn't intentional. There are many factors that gang up on the body as we grow older. One minute it seems as if we're twenty and fit and the next...not so much.

We get busy. In some cases, we're overburdened with responsibilities. Our health gets pushed to the bottom of the 'to-do' list.

There's a commercial for a car insurance carrier that says, "Life comes at you fast" and it usually shows someone who's just been involved in a car accident. Because life comes at us all fast and not just when it comes to driving, it's easy to get bombarded on all sides by life's circumstances.

Not many people are true gluttons - someone who will overeat or over drink *just because*. When it comes to overindulging, there's usually a reason behind it and that reason can be valid - even understandable.

In college, when there's the pressure of cramming for tests, trying to pay for tuition, and keeping up with a heavy class load, good nutrition takes a backseat to whatever food is quick, cheap and can be eaten on the run.

When you're working hard or working long hours trying to make ends meet, exhaustion plays a part in helping you develop that extra weight around the middle. You come home worn out and all you want to do is get something to wolf down and veg out in front of the television.

The last thing in the world you want to do is hit the gym or go take a jog around the block. That's perfectly understandable. We all find our habitual ways of trying to deal with stress.

Stress is known to help in the harboring of belly fat because it acts as a trigger. When we get stressed, we eat.

But weight gain can be a sneak attack. One minute, we look fine. We get busy, life is hectic and the next thing we know, we're staring in shock at a new photo of ourselves. The camera doesn't lie and it's hard to reconcile the belly fat we see on film or in digital format with how we feel.

Inside, we still feel like our appearance is the same as it's always been, but on the outside, in that moment of shock, we and everyone else, sees how the weight has snuck up on us.

Fat Through the Ages

If you've ever looked at any of the paintings done by the world's renowned artists throughout history, you might have encountered ones showcasing people who were overweight.

Some of the people were more than a few pounds overweight. In fact, their belly fat, especially on the nude models, was very obvious. Yet the women's bodies weren't considered to be ugly.

Instead, they were considered plump and visually pleasing to the eye. Why? Because years ago, being overweight was thought to be attractive and even healthy. It also meant you had money to afford food, so it reflected riches as well.

A woman with belly fat was thought to be a good candidate for child bearing, a man with belly fat was thought to be able to be a successful, good provider for his loved ones. People were judged in reverse back then to the way they are now, but science and medical technology have come a far cry from the age of those historical paintings.

Now we know that not only is belly fat unattractive, but left alone, it can shear years off your life span.

What Exactly Is Belly Fat?

By the scientific name, belly fat is known by the title of visceral fat. It's also been called intra abdominal fat. Translated, it means this is fat that you carry in your abdomen and it's deep in the body surrounding your internal organs.

If you're thinking all the medical warnings about the dangers of this fat is mostly hype, you couldn't be more wrong.

Take what this fat does to your liver as an example. Your liver works to transform this fat and this fat then becomes cholesterol in the body. Not the good kind either. We all know what cholesterol does to arteries.

It's fat turned into plaque carried in your blood that sticks to the arteries and in the heart, this plaque constricts the amount of blood able to flow through. When the plaque builds up enough, the blood can't pass through the artery and it leads to a heart attack.

Fat actually has two labels - visceral and subcutaneous. The word subcutaneous means beneath the skin. The subcutaneous fat is the fat you can see as what's commonly called cellulite. Some people refer to cellulite as lumps or flab, but it's all the same. The subcutaneous fat, while unsightly, is not nearly as dangerous to a person's health as visceral fat.

Do family genetics play a part in the amount of fat you carry? Yes, but only a small part. You can still choose to be in the driver's seat with your health and do something about your belly fat.

"I'm a Man - I Can Carry More Belly Fat!"

Actually, this is a myth that most men choose to believe. This myth is something that society created. It's okay for men to have more belly fat than women, it's not as unhealthy, and it's not as attractive ... so goes the myth.

Any belly fat that reaches the point of being overweight is bad for you. Having too much belly fat is a threat to your health whether you're a man or a woman. Belly fat leads to a host of problems that aren't simply confined to your gender.

Belly fat isn't just something hanging around, forcing you to buy bigger clothes and cut another hole in your belt. That fat is working hard to take years from your life - time away from your loved ones.

That fat on your abdomen means there's fat around your internal organs. Having fat around your internal organs translates into health risks and it's not a matter of *if* it will affect your life, but *when*.

Even carrying twenty pounds of belly fat puts you in a higher risk bracket for heart attacks, strokes, and diabetes to name a few. Having belly fat has also been proven to have ties to erectile dysfunction as men age,

which in turn can affect your romantic relationships and lead to depression. Excess belly fat is one of the main causes of death by heart attack because of the problems it's directly linked to.

Carrying excess belly fat can not only make you susceptible to a host of medical conditions that can affect the way you live your life; it can also lead to sleep apnea. Sleep apnea has been directly linked to having belly fat and this condition took the life of a famous athlete several years ago.

The good news for you if you're a man, however, is that men *do* have a tendency to be able to get rid of belly fat faster and easier than women do. Why? Because a man's metabolism is higher than a woman's.

What Belly Fat Means For Women

A lot of women gain belly fat, even if they're still young. But as women grow older, if they're not diligent about their weight, weight gain leading to belly fat can slow everything down - especially the metabolism.

Just like men, when a woman carries belly fat, her odds of having a stroke, heart attack or getting diabetes becomes higher. Diabetes, especially Type II, develops because the pancreas can't produce the insulin the body needs to properly work.

There have been many studies done by leading medical universities proving that belly fat and diabetes go hand in hand.

There other gender-specific health risks for women that can be even more dangerous than the risk of diabetes. Belly fat is instrumental in helping cause so-called *female* cancers, too.

One scientific study linked visceral fat with the odds of developing breast cancer as greatly increased. So when a woman carries belly fat, it doesn't simply mean she won't look good when it's time to hit the beach during the summertime.

Belly fat has also been said to raise a woman's possibilities of being diagnosed with ovarian cancer, one of the silent cancers. Getting rid of the excess belly fat lowers your overall risk of these cancers.

When you're not carrying excess belly fat, you feel better about yourself, you look better and shopping for clothes that fit is certainly a whole lot easier. But the outer appeal aside, it's too risky being a woman with too much belly fat. The fat around your abdomen doesn't just sit there idly. It's hard at work releasing hormones that trigger a hunger response - even if you don't feel hungry.

Teenagers and Belly Fat

Even teenagers are susceptible to the health risks involved with belly fat. In the last ten years, belly fat among young people has increased by more than fifty percent. That's an astonishing and rapid rate.

By carrying too much body fat, teenagers can develop Type II diabetes and today, doctors are seeing far more cases of this type diabetes in teens than in the past. Even if a teenager with belly fat doesn't develop diabetes, they increase their risk of serious health complications by the time they reach their forties.

It's hard enough being a teenager today. Before they reach midlife, teenagers experience all sorts of angst common among people their age. When belly fat becomes apparent, it works to lower their self esteem and can rob them of what should be some of the most wonderful and formative times in their lives.

"I'm a Thin Person, So I Don't Have to Worry About Belly Fat!"

Wrong. You aren't immune to the destruction belly fat can cause in your body. Being thin doesn't exclude a person from carrying around dangerous visceral fat. Researchers are now beginning to realize that visceral fat doesn't discriminate against any body type.

While it's not as obvious in a thin person as it is in people whose bellies stick out noticeably, it's just as bad, if not more so because of the way society assumes thinner people automatically have a healthy fat level.

It's this kind of thinking that leads to undiagnosed or overlooked risks for slender people. If you don't have belly fat to the point where it's able to be seen, then how can you tell if you need to be concerned about visceral fat? There are tests that can tell you how much of your body is composed of this type of fat.

The Outside Versus the Inside

Even if we put all health issues and concerns aside, if we take them off the table and by some wave of a wand could say that belly fat didn't cause any harm to the body at all, there's still the visual appeal. Or in the case of belly fat, the visual un-appeal.

When our belly sticks out over the waistband of our jeans, there's nothing attractive about that to others and while it shouldn't be the case, the truth is, we are judged by our appearance.

We're judged in social settings among our peers, in the workplace with colleagues and if job hunting, people with larger bellies are hired less often than those who are physically fit.

There are also studies proving that fit people get promoted more often than their heavier coworkers. No, it's not fair, and it's not right (not to mention illegal), but it's the way society is.

Worse than the unattractive picture a protruding belly presents to anyone else in our circle, is the way it can make us see *ourselves*. We feel ugly inside based on what the mirror tells us on the outside.

Our inner critic has a field day when we look at ourselves in a full-length mirror, standing sideways with our belly front and center. When we try on clothes and have to go the BBC route (buy bigger clothes) it can make us feel discouraged or disgusted with how our belly looks.

Have you tried to find clothes that flatter a body when you have a larger belly? They're not attractive either.

That disgust or discouragement we feel when trying to find clothes can lead to more overeating, which can lead to beating ourselves up emotionally even more, which leads to overeating....get the picture?

It becomes a cycle, but it doesn't have to be a cycle that we can't break.

How Much Is Too Much?

You can gauge how much is too much by using a measuring tape around the center of your belly. For a man, if your belly measures over forty inches when you use a tape measure around it, then it's too much fat for you to have.

If you're a woman and your belly measures greater than thirty-five inches, it's time to do something about it. Whether you're a man, woman, thin person or obese, baby boomer or teen, belly fat isn't safe to have hanging around.

Do something about it.

Don't procrastinate.

Your life is far too important.



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