

## What Does Your Waist Size Say About Your Health and Fitness? “Wellness Matters”

By Lisa Schilling

Knowing where your body carries fat is important in understanding your risk of various diseases. People who carry their fat in the abdominal region (apple-shaped) have greater health risks than those who carry fat primarily in the hips and thighs (pear shaped). This type of visceral fat storage surrounds the vital organs and too much of it causes havoc in your body.

So what exactly is visceral fat? Your omentum is a fatty layer of tissue located inside the abdomen. It actually hangs *underneath* the stomach muscles and its main purpose is to store fat. Because the omentum lies underneath the muscles, this leads to the abdominal pooch or “pot belly.”

This kind of fat is *inside* the body. The kind of fat storage we see in pear shapes is subcutaneous fat. It resides just underneath the skin’s outer layer, thus making it less harmful to body functioning. When the omentum becomes so large and fatty it will actually start squishing and crowding the other internal organs.

Your visceral fat is a good indicator of how you deal with chronic stress. If you are under constant stress, your body releases high amounts of hormones into your bloodstream in the form of cortisol and adrenaline.

Your body has to deal with these excess hormones, and this is your omentum’s job. It takes these hormones from your bloodstream, and the hormones in turn step up the ability of your omentum to store fat. This results in a plump belly for you and internal disharmony.

The problem is that fat stored in this area is the first source of fuel for all of your internal organs, especially your liver. All of those added hormones throw off your metabolism by making you resistant to insulin, which means that sugar is floating around in your bloodstream instead of being used as normal by your cells.

This can result in tissue damage from chronically raised blood sugar. Your hormone balance is upset due to the abundance of inflammatory chemicals. This increased

inflammation is due to fat being sent as a form of fuel directly to your liver, which in turn sends out the chemicals.

This creates inflammation throughout your system. It also causes “bad” cholesterol and triglyceride levels to rise by fueling your liver with its fat. So it is easy to see that having too much visceral fat is not only visually unappealing, but it is a serious health risk. Chances are if you have a rounded belly, or apple shaped body, your omentum is likely storing fat.

Machines, like the one at Ketcham Community Center, can analyze body composition through bio-impedance. They are a noninvasive way to measure visceral fat levels as well as your fat to muscle ratio.

It is not as accurate as a CT-scan but it is much more convenient and accessible. It can be used to help you set goals. When you know what you are working with, you can begin to monitor your progress as you make changes.

Another more simple measure, which you can do at home, would be to determine your waist to hip ratio. You can use this as a guide to determine if you have increased risk for heart disease, hypertension and diabetes.

**To calculate your waist/hip ratio (WHR):** Divide your waist measurement by your hip measurement (in inches). For men, the waist is measured at the navel. For women, the waist is measured at the narrowest part of the torso—if not visible, use the navel.

General classification of increased risk is defined as the following: Men=(WHR) greater than 1.0, and Women=(WHR) greater than 0.8. An indication of increased risk and need for weight loss, is a waist girth of: greater than 35 inches for women, and greater than 40 inches for men.

A routine of intentional portion control and routine daily activity are enough to start making changes in these numbers. Along with the quality and quantity of food you take in routinely, how long, how often and how intense your activity is, will directly affect your outcome. A fatty omentum is a serious health risk factor that can be prevented. Start taking steps today to live a healthier lifestyle, for you and the ones you love.