

Metabolic Syndrome: Reduce Your Risk

Every day, it seems we hear about the importance of caring for our overall health. While good health is important for everyone, individuals diagnosed with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) need to be particularly concerned as they face a 15 to 25 year shorter lifespan than the national average. This shortened lifespan is a result of increased instances of Metabolic Syndrome (which can lead to heart disease), smoking, and inadequate access to medical care.

Even with this difficult news, **there is hope**. Many of these health risks can actually be treated or avoided altogether by making lifestyle changes. Here, we will explore **Metabolic Syndrome**-what it is and how to reduce your risk.

What is Metabolic Syndrome?

The American Heart Association and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute define Metabolic Syndrome as answering “yes” to three or more of the following five measures:

		Men	Women	How to check
1	Elevated waist circumference	Equal to or greater than 40 inches (102 cm)	Equal to or greater than 35 inches (88 cm)	Measure your waist circumference. This is the length it takes a measuring tape to circle your body at the level of your belly button.
2	Elevated triglycerides	Equal to or greater than 150 mg/dL	Equal to or greater than 150 mg/dL	Go to your doctor and request a fasting lab including this measure.
3	Reduced HDL (“good”) cholesterol	Less than 40 mg/dL	Less than 50 mg/dL	Go to your doctor and request a fasting lab including this measure.
4	Elevated fasting glucose	Equal to or greater than 100 mg/dL	Equal to or greater than 100 mg/dL	Go to your doctor and request a fasting lab including this measure.
5	Elevated blood pressure	Equal to or greater than 130/85 mm Hg	Equal to or greater than 130/85 mm Hg	Go to your doctor or local pharmacy to request a blood pressure reading.

Why focus on Metabolic Syndrome?

Having Metabolic Syndrome is an indication that you are at a higher risk for heart disease, stroke, vascular disease, and type 2 diabetes. These conditions can all result in pre-mature death. For more details about these conditions, visit the American Heart Association's website at www.americanheart.org.

What can I do to avoid it or reduce my risk?

Eating 3 healthy, well balanced meals a day, drinking plenty of water and exercising moderately on a regular basis are all important ways to maintain good health.

Of course, any action plan will depend on your personal needs and on the recommendations of your health care provider. Meeting with your primary care physician is an important first step to identifying risks and determining what is needed to improve your health. During your visit, request to have your blood pressure measured and schedule a fasting lab that will check your triglycerides, HDL's, and fasting blood sugar. The results of these tests will give you and your doctor a good picture of your current health status.

It is also important to talk to your psychiatrist about the potential side effects of your medications. Changes in medication can affect your energy level, attitude, and even your weight. Second-generation anti-psychotic medications and other medicines can be related to metabolic abnormalities. **Be aware that you should never discontinue your medications without speaking with your doctor.**

Metabolic Syndrome occurs over time and therefore won't just "go away" without taking intentional steps to improve your health. Together, you and your health care practitioner can develop an action plan that makes sense for **you**. While there is no easy answer, with some determination and careful attention to lifestyle choices, you can be on your way to improving your health and living a better life!

For more information on metabolic syndrome, visit:

American Heart Association

www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4756