

Belly Fat: Another Consequence of Stress

by Zsuzsanna Fajcsak M.S., C.N.S

Increased fat in the trunk area may be the result of inability to cope with stress. Chronic stress triggers high cortisol levels results, causing hormonal imbalance, adrenal exhaustion, and fat accumulation in the trunk area. (We have two types of fat on our trunk area. The first is the fat layer under skin. The second type of fat is inside the abdominal cavity under the muscles, surrounding the organs.)

Mental/emotional stress and hypoglycemia (low blood sugar levels) from poor diet raise cortisol levels. Chronic high cortisol levels promote fat deposit in the abdominal cavity and thus forms the fat 'belly'. Accumulated abdominal fat is the major cause of unhealthy levels of blood cholesterol, sugar, and insulin leading to heart disease and other degenerative problems.

We can always blame genetics on our tendency to grow a belly, however there are things you can do about it. Genetics is a given but you certainly can do something about your diet and lifestyle. With this article we start a new series of discussions on the prevention and treatment of abdominal fatness. We will start with the dietary part and continue with lifestyle.

The prevention or treatment of unhealthy cholesterol levels, a growing belly, and heart disease starts with your diet. Diet is a very powerful factor keeping your blood sugar (glucose) and insulin levels even. Measuring the blood sugar (glycemic) response after meals, scientists found a great difference between foods. Some of the foods like bread, potato rice, and refined grain products raised blood sugar and insulin levels very high. Whole grain products, fruits, vegetables and legumes kept blood sugar and insulin response low. Dr Jenkins in 1981 was the first to discover this so called glycemic index which ranks foods 0-100 depending on how high they raise blood sugar level after consumption. Today thousands of foods are measured for their glycemic index or GI.

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Diet studies found that a high GI diet (diet high in potatoes, rice and refined grain product) results in unhealthy cholesterol levels and gaining fat mostly in the abdominal cavity. Glycemicly favorable diets, through balanced meals and snacks, promote even blood sugar levels and normalize blood cholesterol levels in diabetic individuals as well. Low GI index diet normalized blood

cholesterol levels even without considerable weight loss. Summarizing the research on GI, Dr. Jennie Brand-Miller found low GI diet a practical and easily manageable diet approach. Exchanging 50% of the carbohydrates of your diet with low GI foods lowers GI significantly and promotes fat loss from the abdominal cavity.

Low GI <55	Intermed. GI 55-70	High GI >70
Above ground vegetables Legumes 10-50 Pasta - parboiled 45-55 Converted Rice 44 Pumpnickel bread 51 Sour dough bread 52 Cooked oat meal 51 Toasted Muesli 43 Apple 44 Yam 51 Barley 25 Cherry 22 Grapefruit 23 Chocolate bar 53 Marmalade 48 Whole milk 27 Chana Dal 8 Potato chip 54 Yogurt/fruit 33	Basmati & long rice 56-58 Whole wheat bread 69 Pita bread 57 Banana unripe 55 Cantaloupe 65 Pineapple 66 Coca-Cola 63 Vanilla ice cream 10% fat 61 Couscous 65 Hamburger bun 65 Oat bran muffin 60 Raisins 65 Popcorn 55 Taco shell 68 Shredded wheat 62 Fruit Syrup diluted 66 Mars Almond bar 65	Inst. boiled rice 87 White bread 70 Potato bread 101 French fries 75 Saltine crackers 74 Pretzels 83 Rice Krispies 82 Watermelon 72 Corn Flakes 84 Pumpkin mashed 75 Gatorade 78 Power aid 73 Total cereal 76 Vanilla wafers 77 Tapioca pudding 81 Kaiser roll 73 Jelly beans 80 French baguette 95 Bagel 72

It may be hard to acknowledge that the solution of our problem lies right in front of us. Diet. You can gain great control over your life and how you feel by learning to built balance meals which is the focus of the next article.

Recommended reading: Dr. Jennie Brand-Miller: Glycemic revolution, 1999.