



Understanding Metabolic Syndrome

What is Metabolic Syndrome and can it be reversed?

by Maggie B. Covington, M.D.

Are you tired much of the time? Have you gained weight – especially around the middle? Have your blood pressure, cholesterol, and/or triglycerides been creeping up over the past few years? Do you have trouble keeping your eyes open after a heavy meal or even after a sweet snack? If your answer to any or all of the above questions is “yes”, then you may be one of a billion people worldwide suffering from Metabolic Syndrome.

Metabolic Syndrome - preventable and reversible

Metabolic syndrome (also known as Syndrome X, Insulin Resistance syndrome) is a preventable and reversible disorder consisting of a cluster of conditions that include high blood pressure (>130/85), elevated triglycerides (>150) and low HDL (<40 in men and <50 in women), elevated fasting blood glucose (> or equal to 100), and waist circumference >35” for women and >40” for men. Traditionally, in order to be diagnosed with metabolic syndrome, you must have at least 3 of the above conditions.

Insulin Resistance

The driving force behind this syndrome is high levels of circulating insulin. This hormone, made in the pancreas, is necessary to drive glucose into the cell in order to make energy for the system. When the cells become resistant to the action of insulin, the body sends the message to produce more insulin to try to get the job done (hence the term insulin resistance). High levels of insulin will increase blood pressure, increase fat deposits around your waist, increase inflammation, increase triglyceride levels, and significantly increase one’s risk for coronary artery disease, heart attack, stroke, diabetes, dementia, and some forms of cancer.

Lifestyle Disorder

Metabolic Syndrome is first and foremost a lifestyle disorder, born of a diet high in sugar, simple carbohydrates, low nutrient fast foods, and low fiber. The typical SAD (Standard American Diet) has reeked havoc on our metabolisms and left us inflamed and chronically ill.

Changing Your Diet

There is substantial evidence, however, that shows switching from a highly processed, high sugar and carb diet to a plant-based diet that emphasizes a much higher intake of vegetables – particularly the leafy green

ones – and a smaller intake of animal protein than we are used to, helps to prevent as well as reverse Metabolic Syndrome. Eliminating or significantly reducing refined sugars, and limiting fruits to 2 servings per day is also part of the magic formula. Completely eliminating sugary drinks that contain high fructose corn syrup such as sodas, juice cocktails, and sports drinks and replacing those with water – plain, flavored with lemon or lime, herbal teas, and mineral water - will go a long way toward shedding pounds and reducing insulin levels.

Rest and Reversing Metabolic Syndrome

Getting adequate, restorative sleep is essential to successfully reversing Metabolic Syndrome along with getting regular exercise that includes aerobic, resistance, and stretching for improved flexibility.

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Dr Covington is a Family Physician who practices Functional Medicine. This is an approach that assesses a patient's underlying nutritional and biochemical imbalances that contribute to illness, and individually tailors therapies to restore health and improve function.

Dr. Covington received her medical degree from Howard University College of Medicine and completed her training in Family Medicine at the University Of Maryland Medical Center. She has completed additional training in nutrition, functional medicine through the Institute for Functional Medicine, and medical acupuncture through the Helms Medical Institute and UCLA. She has held academic faculty positions at Howard University College of Medicine, University of Southern California School of Medicine, and the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

Beyond providing general preventive health care, Dr. Covington's areas of interests include, but are not limited to, the assessment and treatment of hormonal, nutritional, and neurochemical imbalances manifesting as chronic fatigue, anxiety, digestive disorders, metabolic syndrome, depression, menopause, and osteoporosis.