

# Script – Print – The Skinny on Visceral Fat

## This Abdominal Fat is Packed with Potential Problems

Everyone has fat. Big or small, people need body fat for many reasons. It supports your organs, stores energy and even helps build organs. But too much of anything can be a bad thing, and that includes what is called visceral fat.

"Visceral fat is a specific type of body fat that is commonly found close to your organs, such as intestines, your stomach and your liver and is tightly packed around those organs," said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. "It separates itself from regular body fat."

Visceral fat has been associated with a number of health problems, some of which are quite serious including an increased risk for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, some types of cancers and even Alzheimer's disease. Poor diet, chronic stress and inflammation are all contributing factors that can lead to visceral fat.

"The people who are most likely to get visceral fat around their abdominal area is going to increase as you age," said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist. "Men do have a slight higher risk because they tend to be more apple shaped, whereas women tend to hold most of their fat in their hips. But anyone is susceptible and it only increases as we age and over time the buildup occurs."

The good news is there is something you can do about visceral fat before it become a real problem. For starters, experts recommend getting your weight under control by getting 150 minutes of moderately intense exercise a week. That includes walking, resistance training, aerobic classes or anything that will train your muscles as well as your heart.

And diet plays an important role too. Pay close attention to portion control, eat more fruits, vegetables and whole grains and stay away from white bread, pastas and sugary drinks. Just because you don't have a big tummy, doesn't mean you might not have a problem.

"So baby steps is the key for everybody," said Ricki Hickok, exercise physiologist. "We often times overdo it and then we don't last. I always tell people focus on one area to begin with. Start with something that you think might be easier for you. Some people it will be easier to incorporate a healthier diet because maybe they're already doing some things that are on the right track, so just bettering it. Or some people have been active their whole life and took a couple of years off to enjoy retirement or your kids or whatever the case may be so exercise might be easier to redevelop that habit. But focus on one, get in that rhythm. Develop a plan and schedule and then work on the other."