

“Apples” Have More Health Risks Than “Pears”

Overweight people clearly have more health problems than normal weight people. However, mostly carrying the excess weight in the abdominal area is associated with more health risks than mostly carrying the excess weight in the lower body. People with more upper body fat are apple shaped, while people with more lower body fat are shaped like pears.

Researchers are not sure why abdominal obesity is so much more risky, but the risk is definitely real. Most agree that abdominal fat cells are much larger and break down easier than those in the hips and legs. The broken down fat from these abdominal fat cells floods into the blood stream and keeps insulin from working. The body produces more and more insulin, but the insulin cannot help sugar get from the blood into muscles. Eventually, the person will be diagnosed as a diabetic and has a much higher risk of heart disease.

Why do some people carry excess weight in their abdomen and others in their hips and legs? No one really knows the answer yet. Some research indicates a genetic cause and some shows a relationship to the stress hormone, cortisol.

Whatever the cause of abdominal fat, losing it is essential to reduce health risks such as diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. Brisk walking for 30 to 45 minutes each day and calorie reduction are the best ways to reduce abdominal fat.

Sounds simple. Walking and calorie reduction are not easy — a fact well known by anyone who has tried it. For most people, both of these changes are easier if they can find someone who needs to do the same things. Walk Across Texas is going to start March 1. This is an activity program you can do with others. All you need is 7 other people and some walking shoes. Call your county Extension agent, _____, at _____ to sign up.



Updated January 2008