



The Metabolic Syndrome as a sign of Trouble!

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It is a common part of my day to spend time attempting to define what exercise really is. How much activity is enough? The most frequent question that I get after completing a physical examination is “Am I healthy?”. Strangely enough, it seems that those patients who are doing the most for their health already tend to be the ones booking physicals. In recent years, we have come up with more novel ways of telling you that trouble lies ahead, steeped in the support that clinical trials can provide. The Metabolic Syndrome is one of those concepts. At its basis is the notion that we eat too much and don’t exercise enough. This simple notion is creating spare tires in and around our midst in record numbers. We are not talking huge amounts; we are talking tiny extra calories that seemingly don’t matter, but accumulate.

The Metabolic Syndrome refers to five simple things that can be used to tell us when potential trouble for stroke and diabetes is looming, using blood sugar, waist size, 2 cholesterol levels and blood pressure.

If your resting blood pressure is over 130 systolic or above 85 diastolic, score one point. Waist measurements of 35 inches or more in women or over 37 to 40 inches in men get you another point. Fasting blood sugar levels that are higher than normal but not diabetic (6.1 mmole/L and above for those with access to meters) get you that third point and you only need 3 out of 5 to score bingo on this one. Having low good cholesterol values called “high-density lipoproteins” or HDL less than 1.0 for men and less than 1.3 for women, add another point. Finally, the fasting Triglyceride levels of 1.7 or more score one more. Triglycerides are essential but too much leads to trouble.

When you are told you have Metabolic Syndrome, what now? Here is the good news. It is reversible! With exercise and better eating the values will change. I don’t like talking about diets and such. Instead what needs to happen is a permanent correction in the disabling form of food consumption you have habituated to, and a realization that walking and moving is a natural and essential part of living. You can’t change the genetic part of the equation, but other parts you can.

Our body has trouble processing various sugars and consumed fats. We are seeing record numbers of new diabetics probably because our fat cells are over stuffed in record numbers and attempting to cope with the situation produces constant inflammation and irritation to various parts of the cells in our circulatory system. Insulin from our pancreas has a harder time of regulating glucose uptake into our cells and we soon develop resistance and the glucose floats around unused, a condition we call diabetes. You can make a difference today, take that smart phone and spend one day photographing everything you eat, then stare at a thumb-nail page before every meal. Get a pedometer and measure how many steps you are taking. It may not be totally easy, but the change is worth it.