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Lower Your Risk: Metabolic Syndrome

About one-third of U.S. adults have metabolic syndrome, which means they have at least three of these conditions:

- **Abdominal obesity:** Waist measures more than 40 inches (men) or 35 inches (women).
- **Elevated blood pressure:** Blood pressure is at least 135/85. The higher the level, the higher the risk for heart disease.
- **Higher than normal blood sugar:** Fasting blood glucose level is 100 to 125 mg/dL (prediabetes).
- **Low (good) HDL cholesterol:** HDL cholesterol is less than 40 mg/dL (in men) or 50 mg/dL (in women).
- **High triglycerides** (a type of blood fat).

Metabolic syndrome raises the risk for heart disease, stroke, hypertension, type 2 diabetes and other potentially serious health problems.

While scientists don't know what causes metabolic syndrome, insulin resistance* and abdominal obesity are thought to be major factors. The good news is, metabolic syndrome is treatable. While you can't change your age or genes, there are lifestyle changes that can help potentially prevent or reverse metabolic syndrome.

You can reduce your metabolic risk factors with these lifestyle changes:

- **Get serious about eating healthy.** Eat mostly vegetables, fruits, protein-rich lean foods and whole grains.
- **Out of shape?** Get moving regularly, even if it's just a daily walk. Resistance exercises boost metabolic health, too. If you're unaccustomed to exercise, get your health care provider's okay before beginning a physical activity routine.
- **Don't skimp on sleep.** Adults need seven to nine hours a night.
- **Get help for chronic stress.** Ongoing stress can interfere with the body's use of calories and nutrients. Talk to your health care provider about counseling or other stress-reducing therapy.
- **If you smoke, quit.** Smoking harms your blood cholesterol, blood sugar and blood pressure numbers.

***Insulin resistance** occurs when cells become less sensitive and eventually resist insulin, the hormone the pancreas manufactures to make it easier for your body to use blood glucose (sugar).

Ancient Grains, Modern Nutrition

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

You're probably familiar with the most popular grains in North America, which are wheat, corn and rice. But if you want something different to fill the whole grains portion of your plate, try an ancient grain, such as quinoa, teff or amaranth.

These grains are called ancient because their origins go back thousands of years. They come from ancient civilizations, such as the Incas, Aztecs and Egyptians. These grains have remained largely unchanged in the past few hundred years and are not modified by modern breeding techniques.

Ancient grains you can try include:

- Wheat, such as spelt, einkorn, farro, emmer and kamut.
- Blue corn.
- Red or black rice.
- Teff.
- Sorghum
- Buckwheat.
- Black barley.
- Quinoa.
- Amaranth.
- Millet.

Many of these grains are available in their whole, unrefined form. Plus, when these grains are ground into flours, the whole grain is used. The resulting flour has more fiber, vitamins and minerals than refined grains (e.g., white flour or white rice).

Pseudocereal grains, such as quinoa and amaranth, are seeds, but they are used as grains when cooking. They are always in their whole form (they cannot be refined) and are a nutritious option.

Ancient grains are often more sustainable than other grains. They typically require fewer inputs, such as water and pesticides. Cool fact: Quinoa is naturally coated in a bitter seed coat called saponin, which keeps pests away. It reduces the need for pesticides but can have a bitter taste. Always rinse quinoa before cooking.

Fortunately, finding ancient grains has become easier as their popularity has grown. They are in most grocery stores, health food stores and online retailers.

Avoid Exercise Injuries

All of your hard work to get in shape could be offset if you're injured while exercising. Exercise injuries can stem from overuse, improper form and inadequate warm-ups. Prevent injury by taking these steps:

Get a health checkup. If you haven't been exercising regularly, schedule a checkup with your health care provider first to advise you of anything that could limit your exercise plan.

Start slowly. Don't jump into a heavy exercise program. Take time to acclimate your body to its new routine.

Warm up before and cool down after working out. Spend five to ten minutes doing dynamic (active) warm-ups, such as walking slowly and leg lifts. After exercising, incorporate static stretches.

Consider consulting a personal trainer. These fitness specialists can teach you new techniques, refine your form, vary your workouts and safely guide you to higher levels of performance.

Cross train. Switch up your routine so that you aren't running or lifting weights daily; it's the best way to gain strength, get in shape all over and give muscles time to rest.

Listen to your body. If you even feel a twinge of pain, stop what you are doing. Pushing through the pain is not a good thing. Instead, evaluate what you are doing wrong, adjust your form or just take a break.

Hydrate more. Once you start an exercise routine, drink more water than you usually do during the day. Drink eight ounces 20 to 30 minutes before your workout, take sips during it and have eight ounces no more than 30 minutes after you exercise. More may be needed in hot weather.

Q: Does caffeine cause stress?

A: The relationship between caffeine and stress is somewhat complex. Here are a few key points to keep in mind:

- Not everyone metabolizes (processes) caffeine the same, so the effects on individuals can vary.
- Caffeine can raise heart rate and blood pressure temporarily, so for some people, this may cause jittery feelings, especially in larger amounts.
- Suddenly stopping caffeine use after regular intake can lead to withdrawal symptoms, such as headaches and fatigue.
- An excess of caffeine, especially late in the day, can interfere with sleep for some people, which could become a source of stress.
- Modest doses of caffeine can boost one's mood, potentially reducing stress levels.

The bottom line: It can be a matter of trial and error, and each individual needs to figure out what level of caffeine — if any — is best for them. – Eric Endlich, PhD

Effective Shiftwork Sleep Strategies

More than 22 million Americans work nontraditional hours, including rotating, night or on-call shifts. This can be challenging in many ways — especially when it comes to getting enough sleep. Here are some strategies for getting productive shuteye:

Maintain consistency in your sleep schedule even on your days off if you work a constant shift schedule. If you work a rotating shift, use a gradual plan to adjust your sleep time before a scheduled change to give your body time to adapt.

Create an environment conducive to sleeping. This can mean sleeping in a darkened room with an eye mask or using a sound machine to drown out noises.

Turn off your phone at least 30 minutes before going to sleep unless you're on call. Blue light can keep you from falling asleep and constant noise from your phone can interrupt your much-needed rest.

Practice relaxation techniques to wind down. These can include taking a hot shower or bath, meditating or reading.

Establish a bedtime routine. This prepares your brain and body for rest.

Eat three regular, nutritious meals throughout the day. **Important:** Don't eat your largest meal within three hours of your bedtime.

Avoid alcohol and caffeine before sleep. Alcohol disrupts sleep patterns and causes fragmented sleep. Intake of caffeine less than four to six hours before bed can make it difficult to fall asleep.

Talk to your health care provider about taking melatonin supplements. **Caution:** It is unknown whether long-term melatonin use is safe.

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **QuikRisk Assessment: When Your Head Hurts,** is at **personalbest.com/extras/24V9tools.**

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