

How do you measure up



Waist measurement fact sheet

Why measure waist circumference?

Measuring your waist circumference is a simple check to tell how much body fat you have and where it is placed around your body.

Where your fat is located can be an important sign of your risk of developing an ongoing health problem.

No matter what your height or build, an increased waistline is a sign that you could be at greater risk of developing serious ongoing health problems including chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and some cancers.¹

Waist measurement compares closely with body mass index (BMI), however waist measurement is often seen as a better way of checking a person's risk of developing a chronic disease.

Measuring your waistline is a simple check

For an accurate measurement:

- Measure directly against your skin
- Breathe out normally.
- Make sure the tape is snug, without compressing the skin.
- The correct place to measure your waist is horizontally halfway between your lowest rib and the top of your hipbone. This is roughly in line with your belly button.²

What does my waist measurement mean?

The waist measurements below³ (no matter what your height is) suggest you have an increased risk of developing a chronic disease:

Increased risk

- Men: more than 94 centimetres
- Women: more than 80 centimetres

¹ World Health Organization Expert Committee 1995.

² World Health Organization (WHO Expert Committee 1995) which was adapted from Lohman et al. (1988) and the International Society for the Advancement of Kinanthropometry as described by Norton et al. (1996)

³ World Health Organization. Obesity: preventing and managing the global epidemic. Report of a WHO consultation. *WHO Tech Rep Ser* 2000;894(3):i-xii, 1-253; and National Health and Medical Research Council, Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Overweight and Obesity in Adults, 2003, p 46

Greatly increased risk

- Men: more than 102 centimetres
- Women: more than 88 centimetres

NOTE: These are World Health Organisation and National Health & Medical Research Council figures.

Are these waist measurements suitable for all groups?

Waist circumference should only be used for adults to check the risk of developing a chronic disease. Measurements that indicate increased risks for children and teenagers have not yet been developed.⁴

The waist measurements above are recommended for Caucasian men, and Caucasian and Asian women. Recommended waist measurements are yet to be determined for all ethnic groups. It is believed that they may be lower for Asian men than for Caucasian men and are likely to be higher for Pacific Islanders and African Americans (men and women)⁵. The limited data currently available indicates that the risk factors in Aboriginal populations appear to be similar to those in Asian populations; and the risk factors in Torres Strait Islander populations appear to be similar to those found in Pacific Islander populations.

The International Diabetes Federation has established ethnic specific waist measurements⁶ (see table to the right) for when a person is defined as having metabolic syndrome – a condition when a person experiences a number of risk factors for chronic disease e.g. a waist measurement in the risk range along with high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

These figures are probably the most utilised ethnic-specific waist measurement figures. However, it is important to note that these measurements do not have universal support.

Country/Ethnic group		Waist circumference
Europids* In the USA, the ATP III values (102 cm male; 88 cm female) are likely to continue to be used for clinical purposes	Male	≥ 94 cm
	Female	≥ 80 cm
South Asians Based on a Chinese, Malay and Asian-Indian population	Male	≥ 90 cm
	Female	≥ 80 cm
Chinese	Male	≥ 90 cm
	Female	≥ 80 cm
Japanese**	Male	≥ 90 cm
	Female	≥ 80 cm
Ethnic South and Central Americans	Use South Asian recommendations until more specific data are available	
Sub-Saharan Africans	Use European data until more specific data are available	
Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East (Arab) populations	Use European data until more specific data are available	

* In future epidemiological studies of populations of Europid origin, prevalence should be given using both European and North American cut-points to allow better comparisons.

** Originally different values were proposed for Japanese people but new data support the use of the values shown above.

⁴ National Health Data Dictionary Version 12, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2004, p 826.

⁵ National Health and Medical Research Council, Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Management of Overweight and Obesity in Adults, 2003, p 46

⁶ International Diabetes Federation. IDF consensus worldwide definition of the metabolic syndrome. The IDF consensus worldwide definition of the metabolic syndrome.

Australian Better Health Initiative

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