

Waist Circumference Predicts Heart Disease Risk

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - The circumference of your waist correlates more closely with several known risk factors for heart disease than does your body mass index (BMI) -- the measure of weight in relation to height -- according to a report in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

The findings are based on an analysis of data from 10,969 subjects who participated in the third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey from 1998 to 1994.

Dr. Shankuan Zhu, from the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, and colleagues found that waist circumference was more strongly tied to cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and blood glucose levels than was BMI.

Among men, the circumferences that were equivalent in terms of cardiovascular risk to being overweight or obese were highest for whites, lowest for blacks, and intermediate for Mexican Americans. By contrast, the waist measurement cutoffs among women varied little by ethnicity.

Combining the data from the three ethnic groups, waist measurements of 89 and 101 centimeters (35 and 40 inches) in men conferred a cardiovascular risk comparable to BMIs of 25 (overweight) and 30 (obese).

The waistlines with the corresponding risks for women were 83 and 94 cm (about 33 and 37 ins).

"The present study reports waist circumference cutoffs that correspond to well-established BMI cutoffs, recommended by the World Health Organization and the National Institutes of Health for overweight and obesity, in their association with cardiovascular disease risk factors," the researchers conclude.

"Our findings indicate that waist circumference is a better indicator of cardiovascular disease risk than is BMI across three race-ethnicity groups."

SOURCE: American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, February 2005.