Stay Ahead of the Curve

Why it’s wise to say bye-bye to that bulging belly—now!

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A thick midsection is often the butt of jokes, but excess abdominal fat is no laughing matter. Compared with padding elsewhere, belly fat is especially unhealthy because it increases your risk of death from cancer, heart disease and respiratory illnesses.

And although it’s a man’s gut you see pictured here, women are more prone to belly bulge. In their case, it’s often because of menopause-related changes in metabolism and estrogen levels, says Roger D. Cone, PhD, director of the Vanderbilt Institute for Obesity & Metabolism.

The most dangerous kind of belly bulge is caused by visceral fat. This interior fat surrounds vital organs and produces hormones that can harm health. If you’re not measuring up (a waist circumference of 35 inches or more could be unhealthy for women), try a change of diet. Eat more fruits and vegetables and do 30 minutes of physical activity each day at least five times a week.

Also try targeted exercises, such as doing pelvic lifts and tilts and drawing in the bellybutton (a.k.a. the cat-cow yoga position) to tone your tummy. Find descriptions of these exercises at mayoclinic.com. Search “belly fat” and scroll down the page to “Fight Back the Bulge.”

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