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We include products we think are useful for our readers. If you buy through links on this page, we may earn a small commission. Here's our process. Belly fat is more than a nuisance that makes your clothes feel tight. It's seriously harmful. One type of belly fat — referred to as visceral fat — is a major risk factor for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and other conditions (1). Many health organizations use body mass index (BMI) to classify weight and predict the risk of metabolic disease. However, this is misleading, as people with excess belly fat are at an increased risk even if they look thin (2). Though losing fat from this area can be difficult, there are several things you can do to reduce excess abdominal fat. Here are 19 effective tips to lose belly fat, backed by scientific studies. Share on Pinterest Photography by Aya Brackett Soluble fiber absorbs water and forms a gel that helps slow down food as it passes through your digestive system. Studies show that this type of fiber promotes weight loss by helping you feel full, so you naturally eat less. It may also decrease the number of calories your body absorbs from food (3, 4, 5). What's more, soluble fiber may help fight belly fat. An observational study in over 1,100 adults found that for every 10-gram increase in soluble fiber intake, belly fat gain decreased by 3.7% over a 5-year period (6). Make an effort to consume high fiber foods every day. Excellent sources of soluble fiber include flax seed, shirataki noodles, Brussels sprouts, avocados, legumes, blackberries. SUMMARY Soluble fiber may help you to lose weight by increasing fullness and reducing calorie absorption. Try to include plenty of high fiber foods in your weight loss diet. Trans fats are created by pumping hydrogen into unsaturated fats, such as soybean oil. They're found in some margarines and spreads and also often added to packaged foods, but many food producers have stopped using them. These fats have been linked to inflammation, heart disease, insulin resistance, and abdominal fat gain in observational and animal studies (7, 8, 9). A 6-year study found that monkeys who ate a high trans fat diet gained 33% more abdominal fat than those eating a diet high in monounsaturated fat (10). To help reduce belly fat and protect your health, read ingredient labels carefully and stay away from products that contain trans fats. These are often listed as partially hydrogenated fats. SUMMARY Some studies have linked a high intake of trans fat to increased belly fat gain. Regardless of whether you're trying to lose weight, limiting your intake of trans fat is a good idea. Alcohol can have health benefits in small amounts, but it's seriously harmful if you drink too much. Research suggests that too much alcohol can also make you gain belly fat. Observational studies link heavy alcohol consumption to a significantly increased risk of developing central obesity — that is, excess fat storage around the waist (11, 12). Cutting back on alcohol may help reduce your waist size. You don't need to give it up altogether, but limiting the amount you drink in a single day can help. One study on alcohol use involved more than 2,000 people. Results showed those who drank alcohol daily but averaged less than one drink per day had less belly fat than those who drank less frequently but consumed more alcohol on the days they drank (12). SUMMARY Excessive alcohol intake has been associated with increased belly fat. If you need to reduce your waistline, consider drinking alcohol in moderation or abstaining completely. Protein is an extremely important nutrient for weight management. High protein intake increases the release of the fullness hormone PYY, which decreases appetite and promotes fullness. Protein also raises your metabolic rate and helps you to retain muscle mass during weight loss (13, 14, 15). Many observational studies show that people who eat more protein tend to have less abdominal fat than those who eat a lower protein diet (16, 17, 18). Be sure to include a good protein source at every meal, such as meat, fish, eggs, dairy, whey protein, beans. SUMMARY High protein foods, such as fish, lean meat, and beans, are ideal if you're trying to shed some extra pounds around your waist. Stress can make you gain belly fat by triggering the adrenal glands to produce cortisol, which is also known as the stress hormone. Research shows that high cortisol levels increase appetite and drive abdominal fat storage (19, 20). What's more, women who already have a large waist tend to produce more cortisol in response to stress. Increased cortisol further adds to fat gain around the middle (21). To help reduce belly fat, engage in pleasurable activities that relieve stress. Practicing yoga or meditation can be effective methods. SUMMARY Stress may promote fat gain around your waist. Minimizing stress should be one of your priorities if you're trying to lose weight. Sugar contains fructose, which has been linked to several chronic diseases when consumed in excess. These include heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and fatty liver disease (22, 23, 24). Observational studies show a relationship between high sugar intake and increased abdominal fat (25, 26). It's important to realize that more than just refined sugar can lead to belly fat gain. Even healthier sugars, such as real honey, should be used sparingly. SUMMARY Excessive sugar intake is a major cause of weight gain in many people. Limit your intake of candy and processed foods high in added sugar. Aerobic exercise (cardio) is an effective way to improve your health and burn calories. Studies also show that it's one of the most effective forms of exercise for reducing belly fat. However, results are mixed as to whether moderate or high intensity exercise is more beneficial (27, 28, 29). In any case, the frequency and duration of your exercise program are more important than its intensity. One study found that postmenopausal women lost more fat from all areas when they did aerobic exercise for 300 minutes per week, compared with those who exercised 150 minutes per week (30). SUMMARY Aerobic exercise is an effective weight loss method. Studies suggest it's particularly effective at slimming your waistline. Reducing your carb intake can be very beneficial for losing fat, including abdominal fat. Diets with under 50 grams of carbs per day cause belly fat loss in people who are overweight, those at risk for type 2 diabetes, and women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) (31, 32, 33). You don't have to follow a strict low carb diet. Some research suggests that simply replacing refined carbs with unprocessed starchy carbs may improve metabolic health and reduce belly fat (34, 35). In the famous Framingham Heart Study, people with the highest consumption of whole grains were 17% less likely to have excess abdominal fat than those who consumed diets high in refined grains (36). SUMMARY A high intake of refined carbs is associated with excessive belly fat. Consider reducing your carb intake or replacing refined carbs in your diet with healthy carb sources, such as whole grains, legumes, or vegetables. Resistance training, also known as weight lifting or strength training, is important for preserving and gaining muscle mass. Based on studies involving people with prediabetes, type 2 diabetes, and fatty liver disease, resistance training may also be beneficial for belly fat loss (37, 38). In fact, one study involving teenagers with overweight showed that a combination of strength training and aerobic exercise led to the greatest decrease in visceral fat (39). If you decide to start lifting weights, it's a good idea to get advice from a certified personal trainer. SUMMARY Strength training can be an important weight loss strategy and may help reduce belly fat. Studies suggest it's even more effective in combination with aerobic exercise. Sugar-sweetened beverages are loaded with liquid fructose, which can make you gain belly fat. Studies show that sugary drinks lead to increased fat in the liver. One 10-week study found significant abdominal fat gain in people who consumed high fructose beverages (40, 41, 42). Sugary beverages appear to be even worse than high sugar foods. Since your brain doesn't process liquid calories the same way it does solid ones, you're likely to end up consuming too many calories later on and storing them as fat (43, 44). To lose belly fat, it's best to completely avoid sugar-sweetened beverages such as soda, punch, sweet tea, alcoholic mixers containing sugar. SUMMARY Avoiding all liquid forms of sugar, such as sugar-sweetened beverages, is very important if you're trying to shed some extra pounds. Sleep is important for many aspects of your health, including weight. Studies show that people who don't get enough sleep tend to gain more weight, which may include belly fat (45, 46). A 16-year study involving more than 68,000 women found that those who slept less than 5 hours per night were significantly more likely to gain weight than those who slept 7 hours or more per night (47). The condition known as sleep apnea, where breathing stops intermittently during the night, has also been linked to excess visceral fat (48). In addition to sleeping at least 7 hours per night, make sure you're getting sufficient quality sleep. If you suspect you may have sleep apnea or another sleep disorder, speak to a doctor and get treated. SUMMARY Sleep deprivation is linked to an increased risk of weight gain. Getting enough high quality sleep should be one of your main priorities if you plan to lose weight and improve your health. Many things can help you lose weight and belly fat, but consuming fewer calories than your body needs for weight maintenance is key (49). Keeping a food diary or using an online food tracker or app can help you monitor your calorie intake. This strategy has been shown to be beneficial for weight loss (50, 51). In addition, food-tracking tools help you to see your intake of protein, carbs, fiber, and micronutrients. Many also allow you to record your exercise and physical activity. You can find five free apps/websites to track nutrient and calorie intake on this page. SUMMARY As a general weight loss advice, it's always a good idea to keep track of what you're eating. Keeping a food diary or using an online food tracker are two of the most popular ways to do this. Fatty fish are incredibly healthy. They're rich in high quality protein and omega-3 fats that protect you from disease (52, 53). Some evidence suggests that these omega-3 fats may also help reduce visceral fat. Studies in adults and children with fatty liver disease show that fish oil supplements can significantly reduce liver and abdominal fat (54, 55, 56). Aim to get 2-3 servings of fatty fish per week. Good choices include salmon, herring, sardines, mackerel, anchovies. SUMMARY Eating fatty fish or taking omega-3 supplements may improve your overall health. Some evidence also suggests it may reduce belly fat in people with fatty liver disease. Although fruit juice provides vitamins and minerals, it's just as high in sugar as soda and other sweetened beverages. Drinking large amounts may carry the same risk for abdominal fat gain (57). An 8-ounce (240 mL) serving of unsweetened apple juice contains 24 grams of sugar, half of which is fructose (58). To help reduce excess belly fat, replace fruit juice with water, unsweetened iced tea, or sparkling water with a wedge of lemon or lime. SUMMARY When it comes to fat gain, fruit juice can be just as bad as sugary soda. Consider avoiding all sources of liquid sugar to increase your chance of successfully losing weight. Drinking apple cider vinegar has impressive health benefits, including lowering blood sugar levels (59). It contains acetic acid, which has been shown to reduce abdominal fat storage in several animal studies (60, 61, 62). In a 12-week controlled study in men diagnosed with obesity, those who took 1 tablespoon (15 mL) of apple cider vinegar per day lost half an inch (1.4 cm) from their waists (63). Taking 1-2 tablespoons (15-30 mL) of apple cider vinegar per day is safe for most people and may lead to modest fat loss. However, be sure to dilute it with water, as undiluted vinegar can erode the enamel on your teeth. If you want to try apple cider vinegar, there's a good selection to choose from online. SUMMARY Apple cider vinegar may help you to lose some weight. Animal studies suggest it may help to reduce belly fat. Probiotics are bacteria found in some foods and supplements. They have many health benefits, including helping improve gut health and enhancing immune function (64). Researchers have found that different types of bacteria play a role in weight regulation and that having the right balance can help with weight loss, including loss of belly fat. Those shown to reduce belly fat include members of the Lactobacillus family, such as Lactobacillus fermentum, Lactobacillus amylovorus and especially Lactobacillus gasseri (65, 66, 67, 68). Probiotic supplements typically contain several types of bacteria, so make sure you purchase one that provides one or more of these bacterial strains. Shop probiotic supplements online. SUMMARY Taking probiotic supplements may help promote a healthy digestive system. Studies also suggest that beneficial gut bacteria may help promote weight loss. Intermittent fasting has recently become very popular as a weight loss method. It's an eating pattern that cycles between periods of eating and periods of fasting (69). One popular method involves 24-hour fasts once or twice a week. Another consists of fasting every day for 16 hours and eating all your food within an 8-hour period. In a review of studies on intermittent fasting and alternate-day fasting, people experienced a 4-7% decrease in abdominal fat within 6-24 weeks (70). There's some evidence that intermittent fasting, and fasting in general, may not be as beneficial for women as for men. Although certain modified intermittent fasting methods appear to be better options, stop fasting immediately if you experience any negative effects. SUMMARY Intermittent fasting is an eating pattern that alternates between periods of eating and fasting. Studies suggest that it may be one of the most effective ways to lose weight and belly fat. Green tea is an exceptionally healthy beverage. It contains caffeine and the antioxidant epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), both of which appear to boost metabolism (71, 72). EGCG is a catechin, which several studies suggest may help you lose belly fat. The effect may be strengthened when green tea consumption is combined with exercise (73, 74, 75). SUMMARY Regularly drinking green tea has been linked to weight loss, though it's probably not as effective on its own and best combined with exercise. Just doing one of the items on this list won't have a big effect on its own. If you want good results, you need to combine different methods that have been shown to be effective. Interestingly, many of these methods are things generally associated with healthy eating and an overall healthy lifestyle. Therefore, changing your lifestyle for the long term is the key to losing your belly fat and keeping it off. When you have healthy habits and eat real food, fat loss tends to follow as a natural side effect. SUMMARY Losing weight and keeping it off is difficult unless you permanently change your dietary habits and lifestyle. There are no magic solutions to losing belly fat. Weight loss always requires some effort, commitment, and perseverance on your behalf. Successfully adopting some or all of the strategies and lifestyle goals discussed in this article will definitely help you lose the extra pounds around your waist.







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