WHAT IS METABOLIC SYNDROME?
Metabolic syndrome, also known as insulin resistance syndrome and Syndrome X, is a combination of metabolic risk factors that increase the risk of diabetes, stroke, heart disease and other health conditions.

HOW IS METABOLIC SYNDROME DIAGNOSED?
According to the National Institute of Health, at least three of the following metabolic risk factors are required for a diagnosis of metabolic syndrome.

- Abdominal obesity — a waist circumference of 40 inches or more in men and 35 inches or more in women
- Elevated triglyceride level — 150 mg/dL or higher, or taking medication to treat high triglycerides
- Low HDL (“good”) cholesterol level — less than 40mg/dL in men and less than 50mg/dL in women, or taking medication to treat low HDL cholesterol
- Elevated blood pressure — 130/85 mmHg or higher, or taking medication to treat high blood pressure
- Elevated fasting blood glucose — 100 mg/dL or higher, or taking medication to treat high blood sugar

WHAT CAUSES METABOLIC SYNDROME?
Lifestyle — Low activity level, a sedentary lifestyle and being overweight or obese contribute significantly to the risk of developing metabolic syndrome.

Insulin resistance — Insulin is a hormone produced in the pancreas that plays a major role in metabolism. The digestive system breaks carbohydrates down to glucose. Insulin permits absorption of the glucose into the body’s cells where it is converted to energy. In an individual with insulin resistance, insulin is produced but not utilized effectively. As a result, levels rise in the blood. Uncontrolled insulin resistance can lead to the development of type 2 diabetes.

Genetics — Ethnicity and family history influence an individual’s chances of developing metabolic syndrome. A family history that includes type 2 diabetes, hypertension and early heart disease greatly increases the chance of developing metabolic syndrome.

Age — The risk of developing metabolic syndrome increases with age.
WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF HAVING METABOLIC SYNDROME?

An individual with metabolic syndrome is five times as likely to develop diabetes and twice as likely to develop heart disease as someone who does not have the diagnosis.

HOW IS METABOLIC SYNDROME TREATED?

Treatment of metabolic syndrome is focused on managing each of the risk factors. The first line of treatment is making healthy lifestyle changes.

- Lose weight — If you are overweight or obese, weight loss can prevent or treat metabolic syndrome. Changing your eating habits and increasing your activity level will help you lose weight.

- Eat heart healthy — Aim to fill half of your plate with a variety of fruits and vegetables. Incorporate whole grains, nuts and beans. Choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products, lean cuts of meat, poultry without the skin, and seafood. Incorporate healthy unsaturated fats including olive oil. Avoid foods and beverages that are high in sodium (salt) and added sugars.

- Get moving — Physical activity has a beneficial effect on blood pressure, cholesterol levels and insulin resistance regardless of weight loss. Prior to starting physical activity, talk to your doctor about which activities are safe for you.

- Quit smoking — Cigarette smoking, as well as secondhand smoke, increases heart disease and heart attack risk. Discuss tobacco cessation programs and nicotine replacement therapies with your physician. Consider seeking support from a health coaching program or support group.

WHAT IF LIFESTYLE CHANGES ARE NOT ENOUGH TO TREAT METABOLIC SYNDROME?

If lifestyle changes are not enough to control metabolic syndrome, individuals may require medication to treat the risk factors. Prescription medications to manage high blood pressure, high cholesterol and elevated glucose levels may be necessary. Physicians may also recommend taking a low-dose aspirin to reduce an individual’s risk of heart attack and stroke.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For added support or questions, please call a Blues On Call™ health coach at 1-888-BLUE-428.

Log on to the member website listed on the back of your insurance ID card.
- Click on the Health & Wellness tab.
- Click on the Medical Encyclopedia box.
- Under the Health Information tab at the top of the page, select the Health Management Centers to learn more about these risk factors.
- Or, under the Healthy Living tab at the top of the page, select My Health Assistant for online programs to manage your risk factors.