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Fat on tummy only

So why is obesity happening? The obvious, clichéd-but-true answer is that we eat too much high-calorie food and don't burn it off with enough exercise. If only we had more willpower, the problem would go away. But it isn't that easy.When warned about the dangers of overeating, we get briefly spooked and try to do better. Then we're offered a plateful of pancakes smothered in maple syrup, our appetite overpowers our reason, and before we know it, we're at it again. Just why is appetite such a powerful driver of behavior, and, more important, how can we tame it?Within the past few years, science has linked our ravenous appetites to genes and hormones. Among the hormones that fuel these urges are ghrelin and leptin, known as the "hunger hormones." Ghrelin is produced mostly by cells in the stomach lining. Its job is to make you feel hungry by affecting the hypothalamus, which governs metabolism. Ghrelin levels rise in dieters who lose weight and then try to keep it off. It's almost as if their bodies are trying to regain the lost fat. This is one reason why it's hard to lose weight and maintain the loss.Leptin turns your appetite off and is made by fat cells. Low leptin levels increase your appetite and signal your body to store more fat. High leptin levels relay the opposite signal. Many obese people have developed a resistance to the appetite-suppressing effects of leptin and never feel satisfied, no matter how much they eat. Basically, your body uses these hormones to help you stay at your weight and keep you from losing fat — which is another reason why dieting can be so difficult.Lack of sleep promotes obesity by messing with these hunger hormones. If you skimp on sleep, ghrelin levels rise, making you hungry, and leptin levels dip, which signals a need for calories. During my internship, I was chronically sleep-deprived because I had to be at the hospital and stay up all night every third night. I gained a lot of weight that year; now I know why. Years later, after I gave birth to my son Alex, I put on a lot of pounds, too — twenty pounds left over from the pregnancy, and twenty pounds from being up all night with him. He had colic (fussiness) and never slept more than twenty minutes at a time the first six months of his life. My weight started coming off more easily when I got more sleep.Besides ghrelin and leptin, many other hormones play a role in appetite. Scientists have been looking for ways to control all these hunger hormones, but so far nothing usable has panned out.Hunger isn't the only reason people eat and eat and eat. Stress, depression, boredom, loneliness, and even joy all come into play. And some of us may just be inclined to gain weight while others are not, due to genetics. Scientists are unclear as to how much of a role genetics plays in how chubby you are, but estimates range from as low as 20 percent to as high as 90 percent. In studies of twins, researchers have found that siblings wind up with similar body weights, whether or not they are raised in different families, and that adopted children are much more likely to grow to the size of their natural parents than their adoptive ones. Scientists speculate that part of the reason so many of us are susceptible to layering on fat is due to the "thrifty gene." Supposedly, it's a gene passed down from our prehistoric ancestors who could eat a lot and build up reserves of fat to survive frequent famines. Genetically, this made sense when you didn't know if your next meal would be tomorrow or a week from now, but when your next meal is whenever you drive by a fast-food restaurant, that's a problem.Another cause of obesity, one that really fascinates me, has to do with a virus called the adenovirus-36. It comes from the family of common viruses that causes colds, pneumonia, diarrhea, and pinkeye and is present in 30 percent of obese people and 5 percent of non-obese people. Scientists found that when human stem cells are exposed to adenovirus-36, they turn into fat cells. This discovery is more evidence that our expanding waistlines are due to factors other than weak willpower and, theoretically, could lead to the development of a vaccine to prevent obesity. Often, hard-to-budge weight is a symptom of a hidden medical problem. You could have hypothyroidism (sluggish thyroid function), a condition that slows down your metabolism and makes it tough to lose weight, or Cushing's disease, characterized by high levels of the hormone cortisol in the blood. A glut of cortisol triggers weight gain, mostly in the trunk and face. Some women have polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), a treatable condition that involves a hormone imbalance. And about 30 percent of people who are obese have bingeeating disorders. Sufferers don't just munch on a few potato chips, they inhale the whole bag, and they do this kind of thing habitually. Even certain medications, some of which may be sitting in your medicine cabinet right now, can put on pounds. Common offenders include some antidepressants like Paxil and Zoloft; mood stabilizers; diabetes drugs; blood pressure agents; steroids; antiseizure drugs; certain hormones; and antihistamines.So perhaps there is a medical issue that spells weight trouble, or our genes and hormones may be conspiring to makes us eat more, or maybe we're infected with a virus that makes us fat. Should we throw up our hands and say, "Well, I can't do anything about it, so I'll just stay fat"? No, because obesity will affect your health, and it may kill you eventually. You will just have to work a little harder to get your weight under control. Saturated, monounsaturated, trans and poly. Are you confused yet? You may be even if you've been keeping up on what types of fat to eat and which to shun. By now you've probably heard of stealthy trans-fats. If they're not on the "Nutrition Facts" panel yet, they're soon to arrive.Trans-fats are sinister because like saturated fat, they raise total cholesterol and LDL, the "bad" cholesterol levels. Trans-fats lower levels of beneficial HDL cholesterol in the body. Also, consumption of trans-fats may inhibit the absorption of healthy fats that are necessary for the growth and functioning of vital organs. Though much has been made about the dangers of trans-fats, experts caution that those warnings shouldn't overshadow the potentially disastrous effects of saturated fats. Medical expert Dr. Andrea Pennington states that saturated fats "...increase your cholesterol levels, which can lead to clogged arteries, heart attacks, strokes and obesity."Before we go any further, let's take a closer look at the different types of fats.Monounsaturated: These "good" fats are found mainly in plant sources, like nuts, avocados and olive, peanut and canola oils. They are liquid at room temperature.Polysaturated: These fats, which include the healthy omega-3 fatty acids, are also found in plant oils such as safflower, sunflower, corn, flaxseed and canola oils, as well as in seafood. Polysaturated fats are either liquid or soft at room temperature. Essential fatty acids - alpha-linolenic and linoleic acid - are also in the polysaturated group. These fats, which we need to get from the foods we eat, are necessary for the creation of cell walls and hormones in the body.Saturated: These fats are found mostly in animal products. Red meat, poultry, cheese, butter and other dairy products are the main sources. Some plant products like palm, coconut and palm kernel oil are also saturated. These fats are solid at room temperature.Trans-: This type of fat is formed when unsaturated vegetable oils are hydrogenated (or partially hydrogenated) to form solid, more stable fats. Hydrogen atoms are actually added to the oils. Trans-fats include margarine and shortening and are found in everything from crackers, cookies, doughnuts, frozen pie crusts, deep-fried foods and foods with chocolate coatings.This debate has raged on for years. If you're looking for a healthy morning spread, avoid stick margarine. Choose a light, soft margarine or butter substitute that says "trans-fat free" on the package. Butter lovers should use it sparingly to cut down on saturated fat.Trimming the FatKeep your total fat intake to around 30 percent of your total calorie intakeLimit saturated fat intake to no more than 7 to 10 percent of your intakeGet about 10 to 15 percent of total calories from monounsaturated fatsAbout 10 percent of calories should come from polysaturated fatsFor an individual eating 2,000 calories a day this translates to 66 grams of total fat and no more than 16 to 22 grams of saturated fat per day.What's the bottom line? At 9 calories per gram, fats are our most caloric energy source, so we need to keep track of how much we're eating, no matter what type. Still, you'll improve your health greatly by eating more monounsaturated and polysaturated fats, including omega-3 fatty acids. Make an effort to cut back on saturated fats and try to avoid trans-fats.Frances Largeman, R.D., earned her undergraduate degree from Cornell University and completed her dietetic internship at Columbia University in New York. Frances has appeared on local and national TV and has been quoted in Cooking Light magazine, as well as food and health sections of local newspapers across the country. Keep up with the latest daily buzz with the BuzzFeed Daily newsletter! No doubt about it, carbohydrate—commonly known as carbs—gets all the attention in diabetes management. However, another important nutrient to consider as part of a balanced diet is fat. Even though it sounds counter intuitive to what you might expect, eating the right amount of the right type of fat plays an important role in our bodies. Fat cushions organs, stores energy, insulates the body against elements, supports cell growth and more. Since fats are higher in calories per gram, when it comes to fat, the key is being mindful of portions. Eating the right types of fat is also important for reducing your risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, some cancers and other health problems. There are four main types of fat: saturated, trans, monounsaturated and polysaturated fat. The American Diabetes Association recommends including more monounsaturated and polysaturated fats than saturated or trans fats in your diet. Some types of fat are listed in the Nutrition Facts label on food products. Learn how to decode the label. When we talk about fat, it's important to understand what we mean when we mention cholesterol. There are two types: the type found in our blood, known as blood cholesterol, and the cholesterol we eat, known as dietary cholesterol. Blood cholesterol plays an important role in the body and is the starting point in making hormones, cell structures, vitamin D and more. Your body makes more than enough cholesterol for these uses, but it can also absorb small amounts from the foods you eat. When the total cholesterol in your blood is too high, you are at greater risk of heart disease. However, contrary to popular belief, dietary cholesterol has less of an impact on this number than previously believed. For most people, saturated fat and trans fat play a much more significant role in increasing blood cholesterol, resulting in an increased risk of heart disease. Since foods that are typically high in dietary cholesterol are also high in saturated fat, its easiest to focus on limiting saturated fat. To figure out what targets are right for you, talk to a registered dietitian nutritionist (RD/RDN) or your health care provider. Monounsaturated fat Monounsaturated fats are considered part of a healthy, balanced diet because of the protective effect they have on our hearts. These fats have been shown to lower our low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, an important marker for heart health. Monounsaturated fats are not required to be listed on the Nutrition Facts label, but for foods where they are a good source, they often are. Sources of monounsaturated fat include: Avocado Canola oil Nuts like almonds, cashews, pecans and peanuts Olive oil and olives (look for low/reduced sodium) Peanut butter and peanut oil Safflower Oil To include more monounsaturated fats in your diet, try to substitute olive or canola oil instead of butter, margarine or shortening when cooking. Sprinkling a few nuts on a salad, yogurt or cereal is an easy way to eat more monounsaturated fats. But be sure to be mindful of the portions you are eating—like all fats, these products are high in calories. Polysaturated fat Polysaturated fats are another important fat to include as part of a healthy balanced diet. Much like monounsaturated fat, this fat lowers LDL cholesterol and your risk for heart disease and stroke. Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids are two types of polysaturated fat that are also linked with improved heart health. Considered essential fatty acids because our body is unable to produce them, these fats need to be included as part of a healthy diet. Sources of Omega 3s include: Oily fish (salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, tuna) Walnuts Flaxseeds and flaxseed oil Canola Oil Chia seeds Sources of Omega 6s include: Tofu Walnuts Flaxseed and flaxseed oil Canola oil Eggs Sunflower seeds Peanut butter Saturated fat This type of fat can increase your cholesterol, and as a result, your risk of heart disease. This is one of the fats that should be limited in our diet. Typically, this fat is found in animal products and tropical oils that are solid at room temperature. Animal products containing saturated fat include: Lard Fatback and salt pork High-fat meats like regular ground beef, bologna, hot dogs, sausage, bacon and spareribs High-fat dairy products such as full-fat cheese, cream, ice cream, whole milk, 2% milk and sour cream. Butter Cream sauces Gravy made with meat drippings Poultry skin (example: chicken, turkey etc.) Oils containing saturated fat include: Palm oil and palm kernel oil Coconut and coconut oil Saturated fats are listed on the Nutrition Facts label under "total fat". The goal is to get less than 10% of one's calories from saturated fat. For example, someone eating a 2,000 calorie diet should aim for 20 grams or less of saturated fat. To figure out the right target for you, talk to your dietitian. Trans fat Trans fats are produced when liquid oil is made into a solid fat—a process called hydrogenation. Like saturated fat, trans fat can be damaging to blood cholesterol levels. It is more harmful than saturated fat, and for a heart-healthy diet, you want to eat as little trans fat as possible by avoiding foods that contain it. Trans fats are listed on the Nutrition Facts label, making it easier to identify these foods. However, keep in mind that if there isn't at least 0.5 grams or more of trans fat in a food, the label can claim 0 grams. To avoid as much trans fat as possible, you should read the ingredients list on food labels. Look for words like hydrogenated oil or partially hydrogenated oil. Avoid foods that where a liquid oil is listed first on the ingredients list. Sources of trans fat include: Processed foods like snacks (crackers and chips) and baked goods (muffins, cookies and cakes) with hydrogenated oil or partially hydrogenated oil Margarines Shortening Some fast food items, such as french fries For help figuring out what targets are right for you when it comes to fats, talk to a registered dietitian nutritionist (RD/RDN) or your health care provider.

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