



THE BEER BELLY. THE SPARE TIRE. THE TOOL SHED.

IT SEEMS LIKE PACKING A FEW EXTRA POUNDS AROUND THE MIDDLE IS A NORMAL PART OF LIFE, SO WHY NOT JUST GIVE IT AN AFFECTIONATE NICKNAME AND NOT WORRY ABOUT IT?

WELL, IT TURNS OUT THAT POT BELLY CAN HAVE MORE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES THAN JUST PUTTING THE BRAKES ON YOUR CAREER AS AN UNDERWEAR MODEL.

HERE'S THE GOODS ON GUTS.

GUT CHECK

■ THE INSIDE SCOOP

No surprise here: excess body fat comes from taking in too many calories. Age and genetics can play a part in determining how your body handles calories and stores fat. But when it comes right down to it, if your caloric intake is not balanced by energy-burning activity, those calories turn into poundage.

High-calorie alcoholic beverages are not the sole cause of the "beer gut," but they can certainly contribute. When you drink, your liver has to work on processing the alcohol instead of the fat. And as one beer turns into a couple and then a couple more, that calorie count just keeps on ticking up. But any kind of "empty" calories, including booze, sugary sodas, and fatty fried foods, can end up taking residence on your waistline.



■ THE BIG DEAL

Women tend to store subcutaneous fat, that is, in a layer just below the skin, which means their weight gain can be more spread out throughout the body. But men's fat tends to head straight for the belly, forming visceral fat. This kind of fat collects under the muscles, wrapping around internal organs, which is why some guys have that firm "keg" around the middle.

Appearances to the contrary, visceral fat doesn't just sit there. Belly fat is "metabolically active" — it releases a steady stream of inflammatory compounds to your heart, liver and other internal organs that puts them under a lot of additional stress.

Excessive belly fat is linked to a grim list of medical conditions, including high



cholesterol, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and colorectal cancer.

Also, carrying extra pounds up front can result in a literal pain in the back. The extra weight actually pulls your spine forward and drags your lower

back muscles with it. That strain leads to chronic lower back pain, which can range from aggravating to debilitating.

SO, HOW DO YOU BUST THAT GUT?

There's no magic pill or infomercial gadget that will deflate that spare tire. The tried-and-true methods of controlling caloric intake and increasing physical activity are your most reliable allies in the battle of the bulge.

What you end up with starts with what you put in.

- Try to cut out saturated fats in meat and dairy, instead choosing lean sources of protein like chicken and fish, and low-fat dairy products.
- Not all carbs are evil: fiber-rich fruits, vegetables and whole grains fill you up without filling you out. Cut back on sugar and "white" foods like processed bread, white rice and potatoes and watch that waistline dwindle.

- It's really easy to consume a lot of calories in liquid form, with both alcoholic beverages and sugary soft drinks. Moderate what you drink and try washing down meals with water instead.
- Portion control is key to calorie control. Try to structure your meals around a modest-sized plate, half of which is full of fruits and vegetables, one quarter protein, and one quarter whole grains.
- To avoid excess calories sticking around as fat, they have to be burned off through physical activity. It can be a challenge to get up and active when you sit in a cab for hours on end, but even a small increase in activity can yield results.

- Walk as much as you can. If you can get from point A to B on foot, go for it! Take the stairs instead of the elevator. If your job keeps you sitting for long stretches, get up and stretch the legs for a few steps every hour.
- Find some other activity you enjoy, maybe even something you can do with friends and family. Walking, running, cycling, skating... Anything! Exercise that's fun doesn't feel like such a chore.
- Don't obsess over how many sit-ups you can do. Sure, throw some crunches into the mix as part of your overall exercise routine. But what the "AbSmasher 3000" infomercial guys don't want you to know is that "spot exercises" alone won't get rid of belly fat. A more well-rounded (so to speak) regime including cardio and strength training will result in overall weight loss, including the gut.

HERE'S AN ENCOURAGING FACT TO GET YOU STARTED AND KEEP YOU GOING:

Visceral fat tends to break down fairly quickly. Once you start losing weight, the paunch will probably be the first thing to go! 🏃🏻‍♂️