



## MIDRIFF WEIGHT GAIN IN MIDLIFE: HOW TO PREVENT IT

As they approach middle age, most people gain about half a kilo of weight per year, mostly around the midriff. Over the years, this weight gain increases the risk of heart disease and diabetes, as well as the risk of dementia and cancer.

You can prevent this weight gain by making a number of small lifestyle changes. These include paying attention to healthy sleep and TV watching habits, managing stress, as well as getting exercise and controlling your diet.

### Adjustments in diet

When it comes to diet, a good rule of thumb is to keep tabs of calories in versus calories out. Food that is high in fat and high in carbohydrates (starchy food) are most likely to cause weight gain and increase the risk of stroke and cardiac problems. However, using low fat milk may not be the answer, as one study showed it made no difference.

Another study showed that people lost weight when they increased their intake of vegetables, fruit, nuts, whole grains and yoghurt. One international expert went on record that this “Mediterranean” diet reduces all causes of mortality by 48%.

The “calories out” part tends to come down to exercise. Apart from burning calories, regular exercise brings numerous health benefits, including reducing stress. Anything that reduces stress helps to control the inflammatory messengers released into the body that cause weight gain. Stress makes you fat!

### Stress, sleep and watching TV

Watching TV has been found to cause weight gain. This could be the result of being more passive, or perhaps it is caused by eating while watching TV.

Sleep habits play an important role too, with inadequate sleep possibly causing weight gain. You should be getting seven to eight hours sleep per night. People who sleep less than five or six hours a night, as well as those who sleep more than eight or nine hours also have an increased risk of stroke, according to one study.

So, if you want to keep midlife midriff fat at bay, you need to pay attention to lifestyle factors such as diet and sleep. The cumulative effect of these small changes will add up to significant health benefits.

*Some of this information based on the article "Changes in diet and lifestyle and long-term weight gain in women and men" by Mozaffarian D et al. N Engl J Med 2011; 364*