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**Waist Circumference.** In my previous article, I discussed my Body Mass Index (BMI) as the intro to discussing common topics that might come up at doctors’ appointments. Today, I will discuss waist circumference and why it is important. There are two common and competing ideas on measuring the waist, waist circumference and waist-to-hip ratio. Research attempting to settle the debate of the more accurate has not successfully identified one over the other; in other words, as far as predicting health risks is concerned, both are adequate. Waist circumference is easier to measure than waist-to-hip ratio, giving it an edge in popularity (and it is the one I will use for the remainder of this topic). The American Heart Association defines abdominal obesity as having a waist circumference of 35 inches for women and 40 inches for men. These numbers are somewhat higher than those recommended by the International Diabetes Federation (31.5 inches for women and 35.5 inches for men). Your doctor can help you determine which recommendation is most suitable for your individual health needs. To measure your waist circumference, women should find the narrowest part of your midsection and men should measure even with your navel. When measuring, make sure the tape measurer is comfortable and not too loose or too snug.

Now that you know the recommendations and how to obtain your measurement, you might be wondering why this information is important. Research has identified a correlation between abdominal obesity (a waist size about the recommendation) and an increased risk of several diseases, including type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease[[1]](#footnote-1). Therefore, health professionals use your waist circumference to determine your individual risk for developing certain diseases. Abdominal fat surrounds many of your important internal organs; this fat is called visceral fat. Simply put, visceral fat is a gel-like substance that wraps around organs and negatively impacts the way the body functions.

Decreasing your waist circumference is a major step towards a healthier lifestyle. In addition to a healthy diet, try increasing your activity level (and heart rate) so you sweat for 30 to 60 minutes each day. Speak with your health care professional before beginning any exercise program or changing your physical activity patterns.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact me, (903) 473-4580 or email Sarah.Latham@ag.tamu.edu. You may also read more about this and many more topics on my blog, http://agentsarah.blogspot.com/. To view upcoming events or additional information please visit https://rains.agrilife.org/ or follow Rains County AgriLife on Facebook.

1. Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. (2017). Waist Size Matters. https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/obesity-prevention-source/obesity-definition/abdominal-obesity/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)