When you consider your heart disease risk, you usually don’t think that where you carry your extra weight matters. However, if your body shape mirrors that of an apple rather than a pear, you are at greater risk.

It turns out that carrying more fat around the abdomen—an apple-shaped body—rather than the hips—a pear-shaped body—is associated with an increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes in both men and women.

A waist measurement greater than 40 inches for men and greater than 35 inches for women increases the chances of developing risk factors associated with heart disease.

What’s Your Number?

It’s easy to determine your waist-to-hip ratio. Simply use a non-stretchable, flexible tape measure to determine your waist circumference, which is measured between the top of the hip bone and the lower edge of the rib cage without clothing. Next, over light clothing, measure your hips at the widest part of the buttocks.

Finally, calculate your waist-to-hip ratio by dividing your waist measurement, in inches or centimeters, by your hip measurement, in inches or centimeters.

Your risk for cardiovascular disease increases if your waist-to-hip ratio is greater than 0.90 for men and greater than 0.85 for women.

Shape Up to Decrease Risk

Steps to decrease your risk for heart disease don’t focus only on measures that trim fat from your waistline. You also must commit to a lifestyle that promotes a healthy weight and body shape. Here are some measures to get you on the heart-healthy track:

- Stop smoking if you smoke.
- Stick with a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol. Incorporate fish, poultry, and lean cuts of meat into your eating program and limit daily intake to 6 ounces. Also, eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day and reach for whole grains such as rye or wheat bread or whole wheat spaghetti.
- Participate in at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week. Even low- to moderate-intensity activities such as walking, yard work, and cleaning the house can provide health benefits if done daily. More vigorous exercise—including swimming, jogging, and bicycling—can help improve the overall fitness of your heart. Be sure to check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.

Help yourself eat healthier with Keep the Beat: Heart Healthy Recipes, a free booklet published by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Go to www.nhlbi.nih.gov, and type “Keep the Beat” into the search box.
Moving Your Outdoor Workout Inside

Colder, messy weather doesn’t have to spell an end to your workout routine. You can get as good a workout indoors as you can outside. Wherever you exercise, aim for at least 30 minutes of activity most days of the week. A good exercise routine should include both aerobic exercise and resistance, or weight, training.

The following activities, which can be done indoors, all provide aerobic benefits:

- Fast dancing
- Basketball
- Stationary cycling at 13 miles per hour
- Ice- or roller-skating
- Racquetball
- Jogging
- Walking 4 miles per hour
- Swimming at 45 yards per minute
- Singles tennis

There are various ways you can include resistance training in your indoor workout as well:

- Use ankle or wrist weights during an aquatic aerobic session.
- Use the weight training machines at your local gym.
- Use dumbbells at home—or even milk jugs filled with water—to do some simple repetitions of arm exercises.

Feeling too pressed for time to include exercise in your day? Luckily, several indoor activities allow you to exercise and check items off your to-do list at the same time, such as these household chores:

- Washing your windows or floors.
- Reorganizing your closet.
- Scrubbing your shower or tub.

Other indoor activities you can do at home include:

- Walking up and down the stairs at a brisk rate.
- Pedaling on a stationary bicycle while reading, talking on the phone, watching television, or listening to the radio.
- Jumping rope. All you need are comfy shoes and a lightweight rope with foam grips.
- Following an exercise routine on videotape.

Be sure to ask your doctor before starting any new physical activity.◆

Call the Care Coordinator at 1-866-262-4764 for tips on selecting—and sticking to—an exercise program.
Many Americans struggle to maintain a healthy weight. It’s a worthy battle, because carrying extra pounds is linked with a higher risk for diabetes, heart disease, and several cancers. Some studies have suggested that eating a low-glycemic index (GI) diet can help spur weight loss.

The glycemic index is a measure of how carbohydrate foods affect blood sugar levels after they are eaten. Low-GI foods are digested slowly. This limits unhealthy spikes in blood sugar levels. Examples of low-GI foods include high-fiber fruits and veggies, beans, and whole-grain breads and cereals. High-GI foods include white bread, crackers, and cornflakes.

Some studies have found that eating a low-GI diet may help you feel less hungry and improve “good” cholesterol levels. But can it help you lose more weight? Results of weight loss studies have been mixed. Although some found greater weight loss with a low-GI diet at first, its advantage didn’t last. For example, a recent study compared a low-GI diet with a traditional, low-fat diet for 12 weeks among 86 over-weight or obese adults. After 12 weeks, those in the low-GI diet group had lost more weight than those in the low-fat diet group. But after 36 months, total weight loss in each group was similar.

More research on the role of GI in diet and weight loss is needed. Large national organizations, such as the American Dietetic Association, have not changed their weight loss recommendations to include the GI. For now, the best strategy for losing weight remains watching your calorie intake. Portion control and a diet focused on whole grains, fruits and veggies, lean meat, and low-fat or fat-free dairy foods will help you keep calories in check. And don’t forget to exercise. Burning calories through physical activity will bolster your weight loss efforts.

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**Recipe: Low-Fat Ranch Dip**

1. Mix the beans and garlic powder in a blender, adding enough water to achieve the desired consistency. Blend for 2 full minutes to make it silky-smooth.
2. Use a spatula to scrape the mixture into a medium bowl.
3. Stir in the yogurt, cayenne pepper, chives, parsley, tarragon, salt, pepper, and lemon juice.
4. Serve in a bowl surrounded by vegetables, such as baby carrots, cauliflower, broccoli, sugar-snap peas, and celery.

Yield: 4 servings
Serving size: ½ cup
Each serving provides:
Calories: 40
Total fat: 1 g
Saturated fat: 0 g
Sodium: 246 mg
Fiber: 2 g
Online Health Coach Offers Information for Your Better Health Anytime

Through your BlueCare® coverage you have access to Blue Health Solutions℠, a personalized health management resource that can guide you to make smart, health-related choices. One of the valuable resources available to you is the Online Health Coach at MyHealth Solution. To access this health and wellness site dedicated to your personal wellness, visit www.bcnepa.com and click on MyHealth Solution. If you are a first-time visitor to the site, just follow the steps to register to get started. Then you will be directed to take a confidential health assessment. This form is a valuable tool that helps us look at your health history and behaviors to better understand what risks might come up in your future. If you have already completed the assessment, click on “Online Health Coach” in the top left-hand box.

The Online Health Coach can inform you about health issues that are specific to you through presentations and quizzes. Tools such as meal planners for nutrition, a blood pressure log, and so much more can be used to help you achieve your personal health goals. And the Online Health Coach gives you extra support through e-mails sent to your Message Center.

Check out the Online Health Coach today at MyHealth Solution via www.bcnepa.com, so you can start making choices that will help lead you to better health.

Visit www.bcnepa.com and click on MyHealth Solution today.