I can't get rid of my abdominal fat! [1]

Dear Alice,

Help! How do I get rid of abdominal fat? I've been working out now for two years. I seem to be toning up everywhere but my midsection. I am a middle-aged adult female.

Thanks for your advice

Answer

Dear Reader,

First things first? congratulations on keeping up the physical activity routine! Finding and making the time for regular exercise is a challenge, so you're off to a good start. Now, on to your question. Unfortunately, some people (a great majority, actually), just don't have a flat stomach in their genes! The ease (or difficulty) with which we lose or gain weight, or are able (or unable) to tone various parts of our bodies depends on various factors, including age, lifestyle, habits, and yes, genetics. More recently, measuring abdominal fat has become an indicator of health? the less you have, the healthier you may be. No wonder there is so much focus on the midsection!

Generally, women who are older may have more trouble getting rid of abdominal fat because the aging process affects fat distribution in the body; body fat becomes more concentrated in the abdominal region, regardless of total body fat, body weight, or waist circumference. Think of this fat redistribution a little like Robin Hood: fat that hails from the lower regions of the body becomes redistributed around the stomach, and even in the skeletal muscle, the liver, bone marrow, and the heart. What's more, the body's metabolism slows as we grow older (FYI? you may want to check out Slowing metabolism when I hit 30? [2] in the Go Ask Alice! Nutrition & Physical Activity [3] archives for more on this).
Abdominal fat may be a key indicator of a person’s health, as measured by waist size. For women, a waist size of 35 inches or more indicates a high risk for various chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease. For men, a waist size of 40 inches puts indicates a health risk. Nevertheless, keep in mind that the desire to become healthier and lower the risk for disease may differ significantly from the desire to achieve the a specific body shape or size, as commonly celebrated in the media. Pressure from family and friends, as well as from the media, may make some women feel as though it's “perfect body or bust.” This outlook may, in time, become stressful and/or dangerous both mentally and physically. Some people develop eating disorders on their quest to achieve the perfect image.

You seem frustrated with the lack of "results" with your midsection over the past two years. Have you tried enlisting the help of a physical trainer and/or a registered dietitian? Discussing your concerns with a health care provider may be enlightening as well. Perhaps enlisting the help of a friend or other people who support you in your goal would also be helpful. It may also be worthwhile to consider the reasons for why you would like to tone your midsection? Is it because of pressure to look a certain way, or a desire for overall health?

Diet and exercise may be good ways of achieving weight and fitness goals, but a positive body image will get you even farther, by helping you embrace the person you are right now? midsection and all.

Alice!
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Published date:
Mar 22, 1995
Last reviewed on:
Jul 27, 2015
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