

There are a number of factors that can help you assess your risk for health problems like heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure and diabetes. I have discussed a number of these in my *Ask Dr. Gourmet* columns and there is information throughout the Dr. Gourmet web site ([www.DrGourmet.com](http://www.DrGourmet.com)) in *The health of it all...* sidebars.

There are some risks that you can't change, like your family history or gender. Lifestyle issues like exercise and diet are the factors that you have the most control over, and a key to understanding your risk is not just in what you weigh. One indirect measure that is used is the Body Mass Index. This calculation is widely used in research and has proven a fairly accurate predictor of risk for illness.

Another measurement is the Waist to Hip Ratio or WHR. This is calculated by dividing the measurement around your waist by the measurement around your hips. For example:

A 31" waist measurement divided by a hip measurement of 43" will yield a WHR of 0.72:

$$31 \div 43 = 0.72$$

### **To measure your waist and hip circumferences:**

Use a tape measure to check your waist circumference by measuring the distance around your waist just above the belly button.

Use a tape measure to check your hip circumference by measuring the distance around the largest area of your hips at the widest part of the buttocks.

If the result is over 1.0 you would be considered to be at higher risk for heart disease and other health problems. Researchers have called having a high WHR the "apple" shape because weight is centered in the abdomen. People who are apple shaped are at higher risk than those with their weight centered in their hips (also known as "pear" shaped).

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) considers the following WHR to be safe: for men, a ratio <0.90; for women, a ratio <0.80.

Numerous studies have shown that high WHR to be a very accurate predictor of such illness. With my patients I prefer to discuss both of these measurements. Because it is possible to have a Body Mass Index that is high but be in good physical shape, using the WHR can help clarify whether the extra weight is unhealthy or not.

**Please note:** WHR is not considered to be as valid for children, people who are under five feet tall or who have a body mass index (BMI) of 35 or above.