

5 Worst Foods and Drinks for Packing on Belly Fat

Nobody wants to think about weight loss during the holiday season with so many yummy taste treats at holiday parties. It's afterward when most of us get serious about dieting.

Enemy No.1 for many people is belly fat. Health experts say there are medical, as well as cosmetic, reasons for making losing stomach fat a priority.

"Belly fat is the most dangerous fat in your body," nutritionist Tara Gidus, coauthor of the new book *Flat Belly Cookbook for Dummies*, tells Newsmax Health.

"Elevated levels of belly fat can cause inflammation throughout your entire body, increasing risk for heart disease, metabolic syndrome and cancer."

European studies have shown that increasing your waistline by a mere 2 inches—even if you are in a healthy weight range—can increase mortality risk for women by 13 percent and by 17 percent for men.

These five types of foods are among the worst for causing midsection weight gain, says Gidus:

1. Sugar alcohols. These are sugar substitutes that are partially digested. They are low-calorie, but they create belly bloat in many people. They also have a tendency to spark hunger pangs, which lead to eating binges and weight gain. Any sweet product labeled "sugar free" or "no sugar added" is likely to contain sugar alcohols.

2. Carbonated drinks. Diet soft drinks are low-calorie, but they are widely linked to weight gain, diabetes and belly fat. Scientists believe no-calorie sweet drinks slow down

metabolism and push the body to store fat.

3. High-sodium foods. Salt doesn't contain calories, but too much sodium can cause your body to retain excess water weight, making it hard to achieve a flat midsection. Aim to keep sodium intake to less than 2,000 mg per day (1,500 mg if you have high blood pressure). Especially beware of sodium in restaurant and canned foods.

4. Refined carbs. Not all carbohydrates are created equal. White carbs like crackers, white bread and sugary cereals spike blood sugar, leading to fat storage in the belly. Whole grains like brown rice, whole-wheat pasta and popcorn are rich in fiber and better at preventing fat-causing sugar surges.

5. Alcohol. Alcohol can increase appetite and lower inhibitions, making it more difficult to resist unhealthy food temptations. Choose red wine, which has been shown to have heart-healthy and anti-aging properties. Moderation is the key. Stick to one drink daily if you're a woman and two if you're a man.

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