



What is VAT?

Not all fat is the same. Typically, when people gain weight, they primarily add subcutaneous adipose tissue (SAT), which is the soft or doughy fat that usually develops under the surface of the skin. However, some people with HIV can develop excess abdominal fat called visceral adipose tissue (VAT).

VAT:

- Is a hard fat that surrounds a person's abdominal organs
- Is chronic (meaning it lasts a long time)
- May not go away with diet and exercise alone

Who is at Risk?

Some people living with HIV are at risk for excess VAT. People with HIV can gain excess VAT in their abdomen and may actually lose the soft fat in their abdomen and other parts of their body. Accumulating evidence indicates that excess VAT is associated with metabolic abnormalities and may be associated with adverse health consequences.

There are a variety of factors that may increase the risk of someone who is HIV+ developing VAT, including:

- **Age.** People over the age of 40 have a higher chance of being diagnosed with excess VAT.
- **Length of infection.** Those who have had HIV for more than three years are at an increased risk.
- **Markers of disease severity.** If your lowest CD4 count is below 100, you may be at risk. This may be related to the effect HIV has on different types of cells in the body. HIV can change the way those cells normally work.
- **Use and duration of ART.** Anti-retroviral therapy (ART) is believed to play a role in excess VAT. Although not completely understood, the condition may be related to direct effects of the medications or to the viral suppression that happens as a result of taking the medications.
- **Gender.** Women are more likely than men to develop VAT. However, more men in the U.S. are infected with HIV, so there may be more men with the condition.
- **Lifestyle factors.** Smoking and/or having a higher body mass index (BMI) (higher than 26) have been shown to influence the condition.

How is it Diagnosed?

While there is no standardized test for excess VAT, typically a doctor will diagnose the condition through a few common methods:

- Measurement of the waist and hips
- Patient questionnaires
- Assessment of the type of body fat

Why Care About VAT?

VAT can be hard to live with—it feels harder than SAT and can be hard on overall health. Multiple studies show that excess VAT in patients with HIV may be associated with increased morbidity and mortality, which may be due to its link to a variety of health conditions, including high blood pressure, dyslipidemia, insulin resistance, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Learn more at www.DontTakeVAT.com.