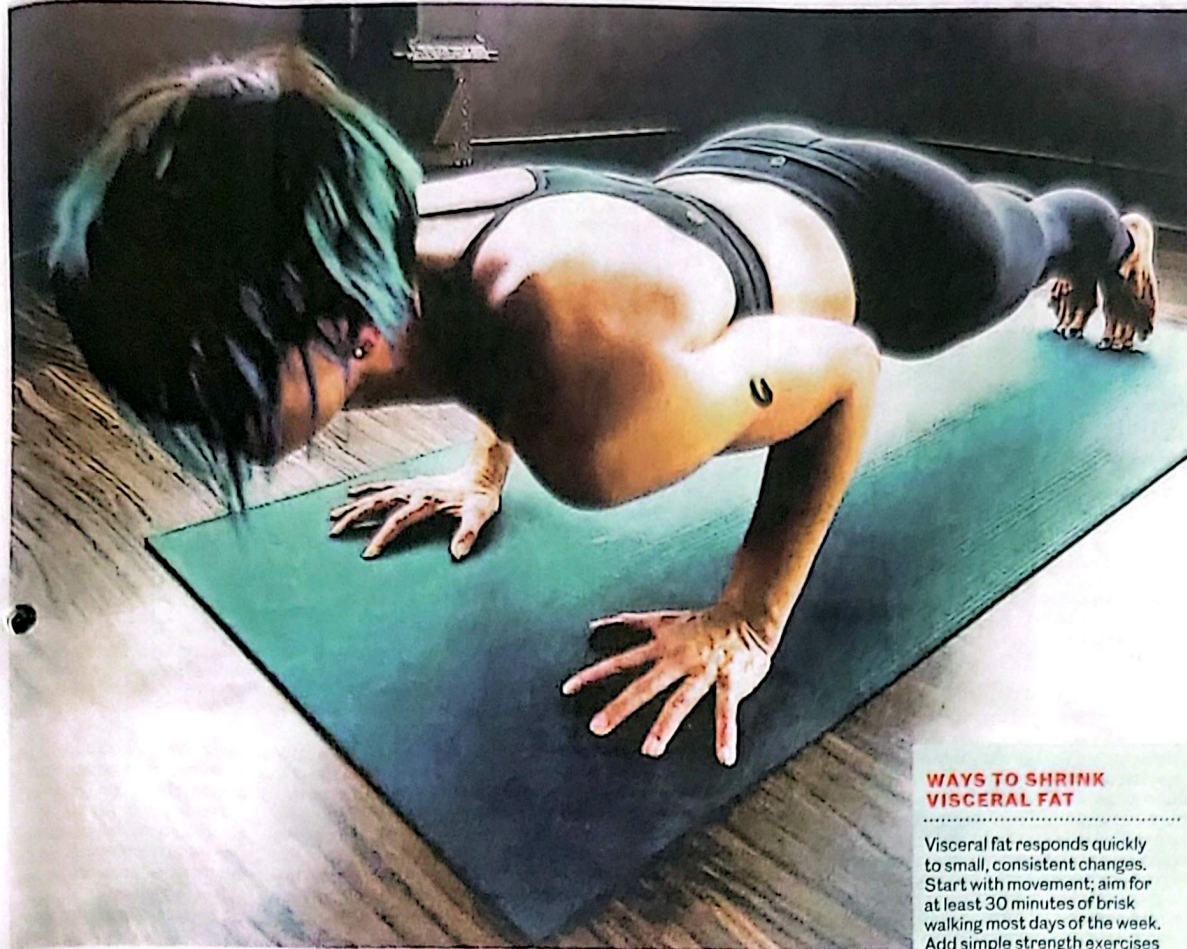




Push-ups are not just about upper body strength, they also help burn calories and reduce overall body fat, including harmful visceral fat stored deep around the organs. PHOTO/PEXELS.COM

Dangerous belly fat you cannot see

Visceral fat, hidden deep around your organs, can silently increase your risk of serious conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. The good news is that with regular exercise, better eating, quality sleep, and stress control, it is one of the easiest types of fat to reduce.

BY TONY MUSHOBOROZI

How do you know if you have visceral fat? One of the most common signs is a firm, rounded belly that feels tight rather than soft.

If your stomach protrudes outward but does not jiggle much when you move, it often indicates that fat is stored internally rather than just beneath the skin.

Another reliable indicator is your waist size; a larger waist circumference, especially when most of your weight is carried around the abdomen, is strong-

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Insightful. Visceral fat is not the fat you can see or pinch, yet it is the most dangerous because it sits deep around vital organs and actively disrupts how the body functions. It increases inflammation, affects hormones, and raises the risk of conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and fatty liver. The encouraging part is that it responds well to lifestyle change," says Dr Ntege Ssengendo.

ly associated with higher levels of visceral fat.

Unlike the fat you can pinch just under your skin, visceral fat is hidden deep inside your abdomen, wrapped around vital organs such as the liver and intestines. Since you cannot see it directly, your body provides indirect clues.

Sports doctor Ntege Ssengendo notes that you may also experience subtle metabolic signs such as frequent fatigue, strong cravings for sugary foods, or feeling hungry soon after eating. These can indicate underlying issues such as insulin resistance.

"In some cases, routine medical tests reveal elevated blood sugar or liver enzymes, which could suggest deeper fat accumulation and conditions such as Non-alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease," he explains.

Understanding why visceral fat matters is crucial. Unlike subcutaneous fat, which lies just beneath the skin, visceral fat is biologically active. It releases inflammatory substances and hormones that interfere with normal body functions. Over time, this increases the risk of serious conditions such as Type 2

WAYS TO SHRINK VISCERAL FAT

Visceral fat responds quickly to small, consistent changes. Start with movement; aim for at least 30 minutes of brisk walking most days of the week. Add simple strength exercises such as squats or push-ups two to three times weekly to boost metabolism.

Rethink your plate by cutting back on sugary drinks and refined carbs, and instead choose whole foods such as vegetables, fruits, beans, eggs, and fish. Prioritise protein to help control hunger and reduce overeating.

Do not overlook sleep; getting seven to nine hours each night helps regulate hormones that affect weight. Finally, manage stress through activities such as walking, deep breathing, or spending time outdoors. Small daily habits, done consistently, can make a big difference.

Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease. Therefore, two people with similar body weights can have very different health risks, depending on where their fat is stored.

The good news, according to Dr Ssengendo, is that visceral fat is also one of the most responsive types of fat when it comes to lifestyle changes. Scientific studies consistently show that you do not need extreme measures to reduce it; just the right combination of habits practised consistently.

How to beat it

One of the most effective ways to reduce visceral fat is regular physical activity, particularly aerobic exercise. Research shows a clear dose-response relationship: the more consistently you engage in activities such as brisk walking, cycling, or jogging, the more visceral fat you lose.

"You do not need to become an athlete. All you need is about 150 to 300 minutes of moderate activity per week to see meaningful changes. Even something as simple as a daily walk can have a powerful effect over time," Ssengendo says.

Strength training

Strength training adds another layer of benefit. While cardio helps burn calories, resistance exercises such as squats, push-ups, and weightlifting improve muscle mass and metabolic health. Studies indicate that combining aerobic exercise with strength training leads to greater reductions in visceral fat than either approach alone. This combination works because it not only burns energy but also improves how your body stores and uses it.

Food

Diet also plays a central role. You do not need a complicated or restrictive eating plan, but quality matters. Diets high in refined carbohydrates and added sugars are strongly associated with increased abdominal fat. On the other hand, whole foods, such as vegetables, fruits, legumes, eggs, and fish, help regulate appetite and improve metabolism. Increasing protein intake, in particular, has been shown to reduce overall calorie intake and limit fat accumulation around the abdomen.

Sleep

Another often overlooked factor is sleep. Dr Ssengendo says poor sleep disrupts hormones that regulate hunger and stress, making it easier for visceral fat to accumulate. Getting seven to nine hours of quality sleep per night supports your body's ability to regulate weight and metabolism effectively.

Stress management

Stress management is equally important. Chronic stress leads to elevated cortisol levels, a hormone that encourages fat storage in the abdominal area. Over time, this contributes directly to increased visceral fat. Simple practices such as regular physical activity, spending time outdoors, or engaging in relaxation techniques can help reduce this effect.

An important insight from recent research is that progress does not have to be perfect to be meaningful. Even when people regain some weight after losing it, improvements in visceral fat and metabolic health can persist. This means that every positive change you make, no matter how small, can have lasting benefits.

What doesn't work

Spot reduction, Dr Ssengendo says, such as doing endless abdominal exercises to reduce belly fat has not been supported by scientific evidence. Similarly, crash diets and "quick fix" supplements rarely produce sustainable results. The most effective approach is steady, consistent improvement in daily habits.

Reducing visceral fat comes down to a few key actions: move your body regularly, eat mostly whole and unprocessed foods, prioritise sleep, and manage stress. These habits do not just reduce fat; they improve your overall health and energy levels.

Ultimately, visceral fat is not something you need to fear, but it is something you should understand.

By recognising the signs early and taking practical, science-backed steps, you can significantly reduce your risk of chronic disease and improve your quality of life. The process does not require perfection, just consistency.