HOW Fast Does Fat Hit Your Waistline?

Have you ever gorged on a big meal and then had to loosen your belt because your tummy was so full? And if you had the nerve to weigh yourself right then, no doubt the scale would register a couple more pounds than you might expect. Turns out there is a reason for both. After a big meal, fat hits your waistline in as little as three hours and causes actual weight gain, according to researchers from Oxford University in Great Britain.

London's Telegraph reports that the fat in food can be converted into tissue around the plumpest parts of the body within hours--far more quickly than anyone previously thought possible.

Led by Fredrik Karpe and Keith Frayne, the Oxford team found that the first fat from any meal enters the bloodstream about one hour after being ingested. And just three to four hours after that, the fat will have been incorporated into the adipose tissue, which is in the fat stores around the waist.

Translation: A moment on the lips, a lifetime on the hips. If you eat a meal containing 30 grams of fat, two to three teaspoons will go straight to your waist. And if you continue to overeat, the fat will then move into tissue around your hips, rear and thighs.

The study has shed new light on how we gain weight, and it is much faster than anyone thought. Prior to this, it was believed that food moved from the tummy into the blood where nutrients were used by muscles; any excess was then stored as fat. Instead, the fat is quickly moved around the body and stored--for good.

"The process is very fast," Karpe, who is a professor of metabolic medicine, told The Telegraph. "The cells in the adipose tissue around the waist catch the fat droplets as the blood carries them and incorporates them into the cells for storage. If you eat too much, you don't get into this phase of starting to mobilize it. There will just be constant accumulation, and you will start to put on weight."

What can you do? Get on the treadmill. The Oxford team also found that fit people have an easier time getting rid of unwanted fat, since exercise gives a long-term boost to fat-burning mechanisms.

The study findings were published in the journal Physiological Reviews.