

## Japan, Seeking Trim Waists



AMAGASAKI, [Japan](#) — Japan, a country not known for its overweight people, has undertaken one of the most ambitious campaigns ever by a nation to slim down its citizenry.

A poster at a public health clinic in Japan reads, "Goodbye, metabo," a word associated with being overweight. The Japanese government is mounting an ambitious weight-loss campaign.

But because the new state-prescribed limit for male waistlines is a **strict** 33.5 inches, he had anxiously measured himself at home a couple of days earlier. "I'm on the border," he said.

Under a national law that came into effect two months ago, companies and local governments must now measure the waistlines of Japanese people between the ages of 40 and 74 as part of their annual checkups. That represents more than 56 million waistlines, or about 44 percent of the entire population.

Those **exceeding** government limits — 33.5 inches for men and 35.4 inches for women, which are identical to thresholds established in 2005 for Japan by the International [Diabetes](#) Federation as

an easy guideline for identifying health risks — and having a weight-related ailment will be given dieting guidance if after three months they do not lose weight. If necessary, those people will be steered toward further **re-education** after six more months.

To reach its goals of shrinking the overweight population by 10 percent over the next four years and 25 percent over the next seven years, the government will impose financial penalties on companies and local governments that fail to meet specific targets. The country's Ministry of Health argues that the campaign will keep the spread of diseases like diabetes and strokes in check.

The ministry also says that curbing widening waistlines will cause in a rapidly aging society's ballooning health care costs, one of the most serious and politically delicate problems facing Japan today. Most Japanese are covered under public health care or through their work. Anger over a plan that would make those 75 and older pay more for health care brought a parliamentary censure motion Wednesday against Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, the first against a prime minister in the country's postwar history.

Yoichi Ogushi, a professor at Tokai University's School of Medicine near Tokyo and an expert on public health, said that there was "no need at all" for the Japanese to lose weight.

"I don't think the campaign will have any positive effect. Now if you did this in the United States, there would be benefits, since there are many Americans who weigh more than 100 kilograms," or about 220 pounds, Mr. Ogushi said. "But the Japanese are so **slender** that they can't afford to lose weight."

In Amagasaki, a city in western Japan, officials have moved **aggressively** to measure waistlines in what the government calls special checkups. The city had to measure at least 65 percent of the 40- to 74-year-olds covered by public health insurance, an "extremely difficult" goal, acknowledged Midori Noguchi, a city official.

The campaign started a couple of years ago when the Health Ministry began beating the drums for a medical condition that few Japanese had ever heard of — metabolic syndrome — a collection of factors that heighten the risk of developing vascular disease and diabetes. Those include abdominal [obesity](#), [high blood pressure](#) and high levels of blood glucose and [cholesterol](#). In no time, the scary-sounding condition was popularly shortened to the funny-sounding metabo, and it has become the nation's shorthand for overweight.

Still, at a city gym in Amagasaki recently, dozens of residents — few of whom appeared overweight — danced to the city's anti-metabo song, which warned against trouser buttons popping and flying away, "pyun-pyun-pyun!"

"Goodbye, metabolic. Let's get our **checkups** together. Go! Go! Go!

Goodbye, metabolic. Don't wait till you get sick. No! No! No!"