

Body Composition and Fat Loss

Figuring out your body composition will help you lose fat, not muscle.



By Dan Young

SOME FACTS ABOUT BODY COMPOSITION

So many people believe that they join a gym to lose weight, when what they actually want is to lose fat. Weight is comprised of both muscle and fat, so losing weight means you are losing both. Losing too much muscle can make it more difficult or even impossible to lose fat. Understanding how to focus on the fat and keep the muscle is the most critical component to realizing your goals and is primarily based on nutrition, not exercise.

One of the first steps in targeting fat loss is understanding your Body Composition. Body Composition is defined as the proportion of fat mass (essential & stored) vs. lean body mass (muscles, bones, glands, organs). Measuring the changes in your Body Composition instead of just using a scale may be the difference between losing that last eight pounds or not. Measuring your Body Composition weekly or monthly will help you track how your body is responding to your diet and exercise regimen. It will help you answer questions like, "How many calories does my body need?" and "What are the ideal ratios of carbohydrate, protein and fat to reach my goals?"

BODY TYPES

Body Type is another factor in achieving your weight-loss and fitness goals. Body Type is the result of genetic (inherited) and environmental factors (diet & exercise). The genetic factors are the building blocks onto which the environmental factors are applied. We are addressing the environmental factors, because the genetic factors cannot be changed. Scientists have determined that human bodies tend to fall into three general Body Types; mesomorphic (muscular), ectomorphic (slimmer and linear) and endomorphic (shorter and rounder). Figuring out what your personal body type is will help you realize that it may take more or less of an effort to achieve your desired results. Here is a quick guide to determining your Body Type based on typical characteristics:

Mesomorph - You have a well-defined chest, and your shoulders are both larger and broader than your waistline. Your stomach,

buttocks, thighs and calves are usually toned and defined.

Ectomorph - You have a delicate, narrow build with narrow hips and pelvis. You will likely have long arms and legs and your muscle and bone outlines are usually visible due to your lower muscle mass and body fat content.

Endomorph - Built mostly like an hourglass, your body fat may have a tendency to settle in the lower regions of your body rather than evenly throughout your body; specifically in the lower abdomen hips and thighs.

So, in achieving your goals, if for instance, you are a female, non-athlete, with a body fat of 38% and you happen to have an endomorphic body type, it may require more exercise and discipline in the kitchen than a similar person who has an ectomorphic body type.

ANALYZING YOUR BODY COMPOSITION

First – You will need to weigh yourself. (Ex. 150lbs)... now put the scale in your closet!

Second – Determine your Body Fat Mass. The easiest way of determining your body fat percentage is with a hand-held resistance meter (fat caliper), which should be available at your health club. If not, just visit your closest GNC or Vitamin Shoppe and pick up skin calipers for about \$15. Follow the directions inside the box, which are extremely easy (I like this method because you can check yourself easily in the privacy of your own home). Once you have determined your body fat percentage, calculate how many pounds of body fat you have by multiplying your body fat percentage by your weight. (Ex. 30% x 150lbs = 45lbs of body fat)

Third – Calculate your Lean Body Mass by subtracting the lbs. body fat from your total weight. (Ex. 150lbs of total weight – 45lbs of body fat mass = 105lbs of lean body mass).

Now you can craft a plan for your fitness and weight (fat)-loss goals.

SETTING & ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

Upon completion of the analysis of your Body Composition, cross-reference your results

to the chart below to obtain the desirable target. By multiplying the target Body Fat % from the chart with the ideal weight for your height/body type, you'll see the number of lbs of fat that you need to lose. Decide how many weeks you'd like your loss-plan to be and now you can develop real goals. Remember, you will be changing your body on a physiological level, which takes time, so plan to lose no more than 1-2 total pounds a week.

Fluctuations in weight from here on out result from changes in muscle mass, body fat and/or water weight. To keep track of which ones are causing your weight changes, measure your Body Composition at least once a month. You may be surprised to discover that while your total weight remains the same, your lean body mass is increasing and your body fat is decreasing. In general, short-term (day to day) fluctuations in weight come primarily from water-weight changes and don't give you a true picture of your progress. This is the main reason I ask you to ignore your scale on a daily basis.

Initially, as you gain muscle and lose the fat, your body may appear to be gaining weight or look larger than before you started, but don't be fooled. You see, as muscle mass is added, the adipose tissue (surface fat) in your body can be pushed further out, making you appear larger than before you started. This is temporary and will change as your metabolism gets faster due to that muscle mass and your body starts to burn fat in response. This more scientific and pragmatic approach to your fitness and weight-loss goals, can help you achieve them quicker and easier than you ever imagined!

BODY FAT PERCENTAGES

Males	Overall Normal Range	Desirable Range
Athlete	5%-16%	6%-12%
Non-Ath.	10%-22%	12%-16%
Females	Overall Normal Range	Desirable Range
Athlete	11%-28%	12%-18%
Non-Ath.	16%-32%	18%-28%

Source: American Council on Exercise (ACE)

Eat well and remember, you are what your food eats!

Dan Young is President and CEO of Performance Food Centers, Corp. He is certified in personal training, sports nutrition and is a triathlete. He has competed in Body Building as well as Endurance Sports Activities. Accomplished in juice bar concept and design, he applies this knowledge to whole-foods nutrition and the efficiency to serving them.