

Body Fat Testing

The body fat percentage of a human or other living being is the total mass of fat divided by total body mass; body fat includes essential body fat and storage body fat. Essential body fat is necessary to maintain life and reproductive functions. The percentage of essential body fat for women is greater than that for men, due to the demands of childbearing and other hormonal functions. The percentage of essential fat is 3–5% in men, and 8–12% in women (referenced through NASM).^[1] Storage body fat consists of fat accumulation in adipose tissue, part of which protects internal organs in the chest and abdomen. The minimum recommended total body fat percentage exceeds the essential fat percentage value reported above. A number of methods are available for determining body fat percentage, such as measurement with calipers or through the use of bioelectrical impedance analysis.



The body fat percentage is a measure of fitness level, since it is the only body measurement which directly calculates a person's relative body composition without regard to height or weight. The widely used body mass index (BMI) provides a measure that allows the comparison of the adiposity of individuals of different heights and weights. While BMI largely increases as adiposity increases, due to differences in body composition, other indicators of body fat give more accurate results; for example, individuals with greater muscle mass or larger bones will have higher BMIs.

Body Fat Tests

Bioelectrical impedance analysis (BIA) is a commonly used method for estimating body composition, and in particular body fat. BIA actually determines the electrical impedance, or opposition to the flow of an electric current through body tissues which can then be used to calculate an estimate of total body water (TBW). TBW can be used to estimate fat-free body mass and, by difference with body weight, body fat.

The skinfold estimation methods are based on a *skinfold test*, also known as a *pinch test*, whereby a pinch of skin is precisely measured by calipers at several standardized points on the body to determine the subcutaneous fat layer thickness. These measurements are converted to an estimated body fat percentage by an equation. Some formulas require as few as three measurements, others as many as seven.

Body fat can be estimated **from body mass index (BMI)**, a person's mass in kilograms divided by the square of the height in meters; if weight is measured in pounds and height in inches, the result can be converted to BMI by multiplying by 703.

There are a number of proposed formulae that relate body fat to BMI.

ACE Body Fat % Chart		
Description	Women	Men
Essential fat	10-13%	2-5%
Athletes	14-20%	6-13%
Fitness	21-24%	14-17%
Average	25-31%	18-24%
Obese	32%+	25%+