



Body Composition Education

The mission of Peak Health is to provide well-being programming that helps you understand, adopt, and maintain a healthy lifestyle, while also mitigating any health risks by educating you on how to manage behaviors that can affect those risks. To determine your level of risk, the Peak Health nurse assesses your health through a series of tests and compares your results to the program's medical standards. One of those five areas of assessment includes body composition.

What is Body Composition?

Body composition is the term used in the well-being and health community to refer to how a health professional determines if you're at a healthy weight for your individual body. Body composition is important because someone else can be the same height and weight as you, but they might have more body fat and less muscle. Healthier body composition is comprised of less fat and more muscle mass. Too much body fat can lead to risks like cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and other health problems.

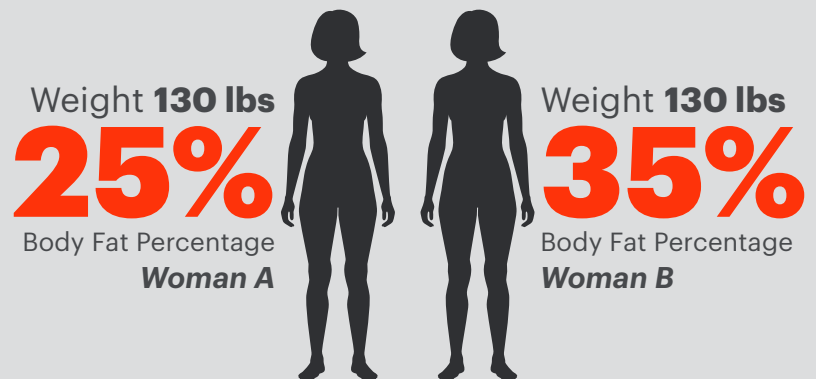
Measuring Body Fat as a Good Indicator of Health Risk

Weight alone is not a clear indicator of good health because it does not distinguish between pounds that come from body fat and those that come from lean body mass or muscle. Carrying too much fat is a condition called obesity, and puts a person at risk for many serious medical conditions including heart disease, diabetes and even certain forms of cancer.¹ In fact, obesity contributes to at least half the chronic diseases in western society. Too little body fat may lead to osteoporosis in later years, irregular periods in women and possible infertility.

Appearances can sometimes be deceiving. Not all pounds are the same.

In the illustration on the right, Women A and B are exactly the same height and weight. But after analyzing body fat levels, Woman A has an acceptable percentage while Woman B is above the recommended range and is at a higher health risk.

Overweight means an excess of total body weight based on population averages for heights and body frame sizes. Athletes and very muscular people may be considered overweight, but that does not mean they are over fat. Obesity means an excess of body fat regardless of weight.





Measuring Waist Circumference as a Good Indicator of Health Risk²

Measuring waist circumference helps screen for possible health risks that come with overweight and obesity. Excessive fat around your abdomen or waist may be serious because it places you at greater risk for developing obesity-related conditions. It is an indicator of visceral fat, which is the fat around your organs. Visceral fat cannot be seen externally; it is located deep in the core abdominal area, surrounding and protecting the vital organs. However, too much visceral fat around the organs can lead to the same issues as overweight and obesity, even if it is not visible on the surface.

Even if your weight and body fat remains constant, as you get older the distribution of fat changes and is more likely to shift to the abdominal area. Ensuring you have a healthy level of visceral fat directly reduces the risk of certain diseases such as heart disease, and high blood pressure and may delay the onset of type 2 diabetes. For women, a waist circumference 35 inches or greater indicates higher than normal visceral body fat. For men, a waist circumference 40 inches or greater indicates higher than normal visceral body fat.

How Can You Improve Your Body Composition?

You can work on improving your body composition through nutrition, physical activity, and stress management.

Nutrition: Eat to be healthy and stay healthy. Transition to a healthier diet centered on whole foods and portion control by choosing foods that are low in sugar and sodium, high in protein and healthy fats. Also limit your carb intake to fruits and vegetables, and try to avoid processed foods.

Exercise: Moderate to high intensity physical exercise that gets you between 50-85% of your **max heart rate** helps increase the volume of blood your heart can pump with each beat. It also helps to burn more calories, which helps to alleviate fat accumulation and encourages your body to use more stored fat for fuel. All exercise can help with fat loss, however weight/strength training is the best way to increase/build lean muscle mass. Make sure your exercise regimen incorporates both strength training and cardio, as each type of exercise has an effect on body composition. Strength training helps you build stronger, leaner muscles and increase your metabolic rate, allowing your body to burn more calories even when resting.

Stress Management: Studies have shown that chronic stress can cause your hormones to go into overdrive, disrupting your insulin sensitivity and eating patterns. Stress also tricks your body into storing more fat.³

How Can I Monitor My Progress?

- » With your Apple Watch or other fitness trackers. Some fitness devices provide readings for body composition (including % body fat) and VO2 max. Many trackers also offer other sophisticated physiological measurements. Note that a few brands have their own terms for these metrics and it takes careful review of their product information to determine how they measure your readings.
- » At your next in-person Peak Health appointment.

For more questions regarding your participation in the Peak Health Program, feel free to contact Peak Health via email at appointment@peak-health.net or call 252.237.5090.



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1 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Adult obesity facts. Accessed 4/4/2022.

2 - Zhang C, Rexrode KM, Van Dam RM, Li TY, Hu FB. Abdominal obesity and the risk of all-cause, cardiovascular, and cancer mortality: sixteen years of follow-up in US women. *Circulation*. 2008 Apr 1;117(13):1658-67.

3 - Stefanaki C, Pervanidou P, Boschiero D, Chrousos GP. Chronic stress and body composition disorders: implications for health and disease. *Hormones (Athens)*. 2018 Mar;17(1):33-43. doi: 10.1007/s42000-018-0023-7. Epub 2018 Apr 27. PMID: 29858868.