

Losing Body Fat vs. Losing Weight

When people say they want to 'lose weight', what they are usually trying to say is that they want to lose their body fat (bf). The difference, however, is crucial.

Losing weight is far easier than losing bf. In this article I will explain what I believe is a very important area that anyone who is overweight needs to understand.

Crash diets which reduce your food intake combined with no exercise are possibly the worst approach to getting your desired body shape. This method will get you to the right 'weight' but at a price – you will not be fit and healthy and it may leave you with undesirable, loose looking, arms, legs and tummy. But at least the weight is off.

If you were to resume the old eating habits once you reached your desired 'weight' you would likely put this weight back on. However subsequent weight gain would add more bf. When repeated over and over this process is referred to as 'yo-yo' dieting.

Eating well and exercising on a regular basis (for life) will help you feel better and achieve the body shape you have always wanted. Toned, elegant and defined, arms legs and stomach combined with improved fitness will give you confidence.

What the scales tell you

In weight terms, a pound weighs a pound. That is all the scales tell you – how many pounds or kilos your body weighs.

But it is what those pounds are made up of that defines how lean you are, and how good you look or don't look. A pound of fat will take up more room than a pound of muscle. Fat jiggles, muscles are firm.

Get Your Body Fat Measured

This is the single most important step; once you know what your bf % you can set about trying to reduce it. When it comes to measuring bf (or, in scientific terms, adipose tissue), things start to get a little more complicated.

There are different methods and the best method (hydrostatic weighing) is usually only available in University laboratories. Try to use the best bioelectrical impedance scales if possible (like the ones in boots) or get someone who knows what they are doing to use callipers.

What should it be?

The average bf in men is 12-18 per cent and 16-25 percent in women, because women need fat in the breasts, pelvis, hips and thighs in order for normal reproductive activity to take place. A minimum level of bf of three to four per cent in men, and a minimum of 12 per cent in women is advised.

This is needed for the healthy functioning of the central nervous system, as well as the bone marrow, organs and muscles.

What your BMI tells you

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a common equation used to estimate a healthy weight range, based on the relationship between a person's height and weight. At no point does it measure a person's bf %.

Since BMI only uses the numbers on the scales and the numbers on the height chart, it doesn't allow for different proportions of muscle and fat to exist within people of the same weight.

An Example of How Poor a measure BMI is ...

The insufficiency of BMI becomes glaringly obvious if we take the example of a 100-metre sprinter and a fat, de-conditioned individual:

These two people might be the same height, and also weigh the same on the scales (because the sprinter has more muscle weight). In this case, their BMI would also be the same.

This is clearly a ridiculous way to measure how healthy someone is, since the sprinter is physically fit and strong, and his or her bf % is likely to be extremely low. On the other hand, the de-conditioned individual is likely to have a very high bf% and to be very unfit and unhealthy as a result.

That said BMI is a very easy for people to understand and lots of these examples of sports people exaggerate BMI's inaccuracies and do not apply as much when someone is obese.

From this we can conclude that bf % is a far better measure of physical fitness and health, than any reading a set of regular scales might give.

Summary - Losing Fat vs. Losing Weight

Losing Fat...	Losing Weight... (crash diet and no exercise)
Protects your muscles & increases your metabolism	Lose mostly muscle
Lose inches quicker - Muscles take up less room than body fat	Body Fat takes up more space than muscles
Feels healthier	Can feel unwell and 'weak'
Needs exercise	No exercise needed
Muscle is firm	Fat Jiggles
Muscles make you burn more calories	Fat requires very few calories to

while at rest	maintain
---------------	----------

Good luck, please leave a comment or ask me a question.

Richard Clarke
Sport & Exercise Scientist

PS connect with us on Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn via our website
www.advancedsportsperformance.co.uk

PPS to see how you can work with the top personal trainer in Swansea please
contact us through our website

www.richard-clarke.co.uk (blog)
www.advancedsportsperformance.co.uk