

Body Fat Standards

The American College of Sport's Medicine developed the following reference ranges based on research.

	Age	Women	Men
Health Standards *	<40 yrs.	20-35%	8-22%
	>40 yrs.	25-38%	10-25%
Fitness Standards *	<40 yrs.	16-28%	5-15%
	>40 yrs.	20-33%	7-18%
High Risk *			
Inadequate fat	all adults	<12-14%	<3-5%
Obesity	<40 yrs.	>35%	>22%
	>40 yrs.	>38%	>25%

- "Health standards" reflect the percent of body fat that generally does not increase your risk for health problems. Excessive body fat, especially around the abdomen, can increase your risk for high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoarthritis, and heart disease. Young men who have greater than 22% body fat and young women who have greater than 35% body fat may be at greater risk for these health problems, independent of their eating, activity, and other lifestyle behaviors.
- "Fitness standards" reflect the percent of body fat that generally results from greater physical training. A greater percentage of muscle and lower percentage of fat may improve strength, speed, endurance, and agility. However, dropping below 16% body fat for women and 5% body fat for men DOES NOT further increase your athletic performance or level of fitness. Instead, too low body fat can actually impair your physical health and performance. Men and women need a certain amount of body fat to insulate vital organs, regulate body temperature, and ensure adequate production of sex hormones. In particular, women who restrict calories and exercise excessively may have a very low percentage of body fat and consequently have very low estrogen levels and stop menstruating. Because estrogen keeps women's bones strong, women who stop menstruating are at much greater risk for stress fractures and a debilitating bone-thinning disease called osteoporosis.