

Fat Facts and How to Lose Body Fat

This is the TD Fitness podcast with Coach T, episode number 76.

Welcome to the TD Fitness podcast, giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. And now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey, hey, hey guys, welcome back to TD Fitness. This is Coach T and this is episode number 76 where we're talking fat facts, how to lose body fat and some specifics when it comes to fat loss for women. And I think everyone's going to find some benefit here, because fat is really one of the commonly misunderstood nutrients if you will and it can be confusing when it comes to talking about fat from a health standpoint. And really I want to go over some of the lesser known facts about fat as well. So I'll give you some facts to start with, then we'll talk about body fat in particular and how to lose that body fat. And I'm going to wrap it up with some special considerations for women, because there are some unique differences and some unique considerations that we have to think about when it comes to fat loss for women. So let's dive right in.

We're going to go right into some of the general fat facts just to kind of level the playing field here and make sure we're all tracking on the same foundation of knowledge. So fats are one of the three major nutrients. You think about protein, you think about carbs, well, fats are in that discussion as well. And let's remember that fats and proteins and carbs, really everything we eat is there to serve from a nutritional standpoint and from an energy standpoint. It's not just about satisfying your appetite, okay? So fats are important and when it comes to fats, typically we think about them in three different categories. You have saturated fats, which, the easiest way to think about the saturated fats is that they tend to be solid at room temperature. So really when I think of saturated fats, I think about the things that can actually clog your arteries. Okay?

Saturated fats are found in animal proteins, dairy, some packaged food products and a diet high in saturated fat could put you at risk for heart disease. So it's saturated fat, you really want to watch your intake of those. Then you have unsaturated fats and these are more liquid at room temperature. These are, these include some of the healthier fats, some of those omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, those types of fats that are found in cold water fish. Some beans and oils like corn oil, canola oil, olive oil is found in peanuts. Some other foods that can contain unsaturated fats include avocados, chia seeds, almonds, one of my favorite snacks. And then you have the trans fats, and these are particularly dangerous because they're not natural for one. So trans fats are manmade, and the way you make a trans fat is by taking an unsaturated fat, which again, naturally is more healthy. But then you add hydrogen to it, you hydrogenate it so that it turns into a solid.

Now you may be wondering, well why would anyone want to do this? Well, it's part of a manufacturing process that is used to increase the shelf life of certain food products. And you can see how this could be beneficial to food producers, because packaged foods which are typically high in trans fats can remain on the shelves longer so they don't have to sell as quick. So from a monetary standpoint, again, you can see how that can be beneficial. Now I will say that there has, there have recently been moved over the last few years to reduce the amount of trans fats found in many foods. So hopefully you're not seeing as much of that, but just be aware that trans fats are the most dangerous. They've been linked to heart disease

TDFit076 (Completed 05/02/19)

and elevated levels of LDL, or the bad cholesterol, if you will. So you have saturated fats, you have unsaturated fats, and you have trans fats. With trans fats being the least healthy, you want to limit your intake if you can of the saturated fats and those unsaturated fats are a little more healthy for you.

Now, I mentioned that all of the nutrients that we consume are used by the body for energy. Fat happens to be the most energy dense food. And what I mean by that is that fats contain the most calories per gram compared to proteins and carbohydrates. So fats provide nine calories of energy per gram, while proteins provide, and proteins and carbohydrates actually each provide four calories per gram. It's also important to understand how our body metabolizes fat and really where fat falls on the spectrum of the type of energy or the type of, that nutrient that our bodies are going to burn for energy. So what I mean by that is that there is a sliding scale from, if you think about me recording this episode right now, I'm not exerting a lot of energy, right? It's not like I'm running a marathon or a sprint. I'm really just standing here and recording myself talk. So I'm not burning very many calories, relatively speaking.

And when you're at rest, and when you're conducting very low intensity exercise, fat actually makes up the majority of the energy source for your body. So fat provides approximately 70% of the energy for bodily functions when you're at rest and during low intensity physical activity. Now as you progress through that intensity spectrum, as you get more intense with your exercise, you start to run faster, you start to exert more energy, or you near your maximum heart rate, like you're really putting out, you're all out effort. Then fat is not really being burned in that sense at all or at that state, because now your body is resorting to, I can't talk here, resorting to other sources of energy, namely in the form of carbohydrates in those more readily accessible nutrients that your body has stored. And the reason is, because fat requires oxygen in order to burn. So you've heard about the fat burning zone, the fat burning zone is real, but it's often confused.

So again, burning fat requires oxygen and oxygen is readily available. When I'm standing here not exerting a lot of effort and when you're exercising in a very low intensity or you're not exercising at all. But as the intensity of exercise increases, again, that demand for energy is going to be greater and the body requires energy quicker than it can use oxygen to burn the fat. So when you think about the fat burning zone, here's what I want you to remember. The percentage of what you're burning in the fat burning zone is going to be greater when it comes to fat. So you're burning a greater percentage of fat in the fat burning zone, but your overall calorie burn, my overall calorie burn right now, while I'm not exercising intensely, is going to be much lower than it would be if I was exercising intensely. Okay? I actually wrote a blog post about this a few years back, it's called fat burning made simple. I'll be sure to link to that in the show notes.

But in other words, what I'm trying to say is working at an intensity where fat is the primary source of fuel is not going to burn that many calories, that many total calories. So I'll talk a little bit later about the importance of high intensity interval training, particularly when it comes to women, to females, because that's going to be particularly important as you look to burn some fat calories. So the takeaway from this first section, if you will hear these fat facts, is that fat is one of the three main nutrients and it's an important part of a healthy diet. And I don't want you to think of fat as something that is necessarily bad or something that you should avoid. I mean, that's really, it's really kind of a 1980s thinking mindset, right? But rather I want you to think about it as an important source of energy for the body and in moderation, unsaturated fats, even saturated fats, it's okay. All right? So just for, don't dwell on the low fat mantra that you may have heard in the past.

Appreciate the role that fat plays in supporting, you know, your bodily functions and the energy that it provides. A healthy diet should contain really adequate amounts of those unsaturated fats and again, limited amounts of saturated fats and almost no trans fat, so that's kind of the takeaway here. Now, one other thing I want to mention before moving on is that stress can increase body fat. You've heard me mention the effects of stress before when it comes to weight loss and weight retention really, and again, I'll highlight it here because I think it's important and it's something that we so often overlook. You know, we think about living healthier and immediately our minds go to exercise and eating well, which are two very good things. Don't get me wrong, but stress plays such an important role and I think it's becoming even more prevalent and more important in today's world, because there are so many, so many smaller stresses that tend to add up just from simple things like you know, your phone being with you all the time and never really being off of work, always being connected.

That in itself creates certain stressors and tends to elevate our level of stress, cumulatively over a period of time. So when you have continued and elevated levels of stress, really those sympathetic hormones of cortisol and norepinephrine, they can cause us to retain fat. Also, when we don't exercise, remember exercise serves as a stress reliever. You have to understand that the body is going to release more of those triglycerides into the bloodstream during times of stress. And it's kind of a natural function and it anticipates that your body's going to use those triglycerides during times of stress for energy, for working muscles. But if there's no significant physical activity to use that energy, then those triglycerides will be stored until they're needed at a later time. And what that means, the translation here is that your body's going to hold on to that fat. So the bottom line is that stress management plays such an important role in preventing your body from holding on to excess fat. Okay?

So those are kind of the fat facts that I just wanted to kind of level the playing field and set the foundation there. Now I want to talk a little bit about body fat, okay? So you have the types of fat that you can actually consume, but where and how we store fat in and on our bodies is also very important. It's important to understand that all fat is not created equal regarding where it's stored on the body. So really that there are two types of fat to consider here. The first is called subcutaneous fat and that's really the fat in between your skin and your muscles. It's the, kind of the squishy fat that has some actually positive benefits. I mean, it serves to keep you warm. It serves as a cushion in some areas, can protect against, you know, kind of blunt force or shock, and it stores extra calories, which you know, really doesn't sound that good, but extra calories you need sometimes, again for energy.

That's the fat that you may be able to feel in your arms, in your legs. That's the subcutaneous fat and it's the fat that is usually referred to as the pinchable fat. So aside from subcutaneous fat, you also have visceral fat and that is the dangerous stuff. That's the stuff that's, that's the fat that's located in and around your organs. And it's important to understand that, because it's really stored around a number of those important internal organs, like the liver, the pancreas, and the intestines. Sometimes this is referred to as the active fat, because research has actually shown that this type of fat is more dangerous because of its proximity to those vital organs and it can affect how our hormones function. So storing higher amounts of visceral fat is actually related to a number of health issues. I'll mention those in a minute, but that is something that you want to consider. So the difference between that visceral fat, that fat stored in and around your vital organs and your mid-section there and subcutaneous fat, which is kind of the fat that we all immediately notice, you know, in the extremities.

Visceral fat is typically not pinchable. Again, that's the deeper fat, but rather it's pressable. So you may be able to press it and kind of see an indentation remain momentarily. That's kind of the difference between that pinchable, that subcutaneous fat and the pressable visceral

TDFit076 (Completed 05/02/19)

fat. So why is this important? Well, if you, as I mentioned, if you carry larger amounts or greater quantities of that visceral fat, then you can be exposed to a significantly increased risk of a number of health conditions. And I'm talking, insulin sensitivity, which can increase your risk of type two diabetes. Higher levels of cholesterol, elevated blood pressure and those three are ones that we typically see run together from time to time. You know, you start to carry some excess weight, you start to become pre-diabetic or maybe even full blown diabetic. You have high cholesterol, you have high blood pressure, and that's really where you start to enter a dangerous state. And it's because you're carrying, a lot of times, because you're carrying a lot of that excess weight around those vital organs.

Heart diseases is another thing that can stem from that. And they've also been studies to show links to certain types of cancer, like breast cancer, colorectal cancer, and even Alzheimer's disease. So this is serious stuff, you know, when we're talking about this visceral fat, this is no kidding, dangerous. So that's why I want to bring it up and make sure that you guys are aware of this. Now the question you're probably asking is, "Okay, who does this apply to and how can I tell if I'm at risk?" Well, I'll tell you that a relatively good indicator of visceral fat is really just to take a measurement of your waistline. So one Harvard University study that I read noted that about 10% of our total fat is likely to be stored as visceral fat. So if you're carrying higher amounts of body fat in general, more than recommended, then it's more likely that you're also carrying more visceral fat, a greater quantity of visceral fat than is healthy.

So, if you measure around the mid section then obviously a growing belly can be the result of, you know, some of that visceral fat, but it could be a result of both types of fat, but the visceral fat is really what we're concerned about. Research though has shown that the size of our belly is a relatively reliable indicator of the health risks that are linked to and associated with visceral fat. And I'll give you a couple of numbers here for you to remember. The first is that if you measure your waist circumference and we'll just keep it simple, if you measure directly across your belly button, make sure that the tape measure is, you know, level in relation to the floor. And don't squeeze in and don't push out, just relax your gut and take a couple of measurements and take the average of those measurements, what you are looking for, for men is to have a waist circumference of less than 40 inches and for women to have a waist circumference of less than 35 inches. Okay?

So those are the two numbers to remember. Anything above that puts you at a significantly greater risk of some of those health issues that I just mentioned. Another thing to, another way to think about it, you may have heard about the apple shape versus the pear shape and that's really just a quick visual reference of where most of the fat is stored on your body. So pears, for example, if you have a pear shape, then you tend to store fat in the lower extremities. Like the hips, the thighs, and in your buttocks. And typically that store it is subcutaneous fat. Apple shapes on the other hand, tend to store fat in the upper region, like the belly and the chest, and that's typically stored as visceral fat. So that's generally considered less healthy. So again, just another way to think of it, a pear shape versus an apple shape.

But while we're talking about shapes, another set of measurements that can give you a pretty good idea of where you fall on this health spectrum, and this is one that I particularly like definitely more so than you know, just hopping on the scale and it's a little bit better than just taking a waist measurement. But that's your waist to hip ratio, because the comparison of the measurements between your waste and your hip can give you an idea of not only the proportion, your proportion, but also the fat distribution on your body. So the way to get that measurement is to measure your waist, like I've already described it across your belly button, and then to measure your hips. And when you measure your hips, you want to take the widest

measurement, the widest part around your buttocks, okay? And your waist to hip ratio is going to be your waist circumference, then divided by that hip circumference.

So the measurements you get for each, you just divide your waist measurement by your hip measurement. What you're looking for, if you're male, you should have a waist to hip ratio of less than 1.0. And that essentially means that your waist is smaller than your hips. Women should have a waist to hip ratio of less than 0.8, meaning similarly, your waist is smaller than your hips, but your fat is distributed more in the hip region, which is more normal for women. And it goes back to childbirth and all of the different hormones and multiple things associated just with women carrying more weight and that is completely natural. So it's not unhealthy if you have a waist to hip ratio of less than the 0.8. So those are some things to remember. It's important to point out too though, that all of us have a certain amount of visceral fat. It's not that you can completely get rid of it, even if you're thin, you can still have visceral fat around the abdominal region. I mean, being skinny doesn't necessarily mean that you're healthy, right?

Another thing to remember is that if your parents or your siblings have some kind of insulin resistance, or if there's a history of heart disease, or a fatty liver that's not related to alcohol, then you may be at a greater risk of storing visceral fat. So it's important to know your family health history. Okay? So one of the burning questions that I often get is how to lose it, right? How to lose fat. And I'll tell you that there are no big surprises here. The point is, the point that I'm trying to get across with this episode and with this topic is to really connect some of those dots from the advice that I've given before. Dispel a couple of myths that you may have heard elsewhere and then remind you of the way forward, a healthy living way forward. So when it comes to myths, you know, fat does not turn into muscle, all right? And muscle does not turn into fat for that matter. Those are two different things. You can lose fat, you can gain fat, you can lose muscle and gain muscle. Okay?

So a lot of times I'll get a goal from folks that I work with saying, "Well, I want to tone my muscles," and you know, that means different things to different people. But typically, typically what that means is I want to lose some fat and gain a little bit of muscle so that I can see some definition. Okay? Fat and muscle, two different things. One does not turn into the other and vice versa. Also, another myth and this is a little bit of bad news, you can't spot reduce, meaning you cannot target a region of your body where you want to lose weight. Actually, you can try to target it, but that doesn't mean that you're going to lose weight there. And it doesn't matter how many sit ups or crunches you do, that doesn't mean you're going to lose fat in your midsection. Okay? The good news, however, is that, you know, we talked about that visceral fat, well, because of its proximity to the liver, visceral fat is actually easier to burn.

And it's because of the liver's role in metabolism and the way our body is going to handle those nutrients that we consume. Subcutaneous fat, that's the fat that likes to stick around. So that's the stuff in the extremities and that may stick around a little bit longer, but it's not impossible to lose it. The good thing though, again, is that the visceral fat, which is the dangerous stuff, is usually going to be burned quicker and a little bit easier. And that's really another one of those reasons why, you know, I talk about the importance of exercise even when you're not seeing visual benefits right away. You have to understand that there are good things happening internally that you may not be able to see in the mirror. So that's part of the reason why exercise and diet are important, even if you don't visually see the results right away. Okay?

So going back to the question, how do you lose weight? Well, living a healthy lifestyle is the general answer, right? But it's not just about your weight. You want to track your waist and

TDFit076 (Completed 05/02/19)

your hip measurements, because each of those measurements, including weight can be useful to some degree, the key is to really understand what they all mean. All right? Another part of living healthy obviously is moving more. I'll remind you of the recommended amount of exercise for the general population and that's 150 minutes of exercise minimum each week. That equates to, just over 20 minutes a day, right? If you do it, if you exercise every day, but regular exercise again helps you get rid of that visceral fat. Also, you want to eat well. And really the big gotchas here are those added sugars, excess alcohol and too many of the simple carbs that can easily be stored as simple fat. And then going back to the rest, you want to get rest because a lack of sleep and added stress, both serve to retain body fat. So those are some things to remember.

Now, I'll move into the final bit here and that is the topic of women and fat loss, because there are some unique considerations for women when it comes to fat loss. Some general differences in men and women. So women rely more on fat for fuel during exercise, you know? When compared to men and that's because they have a greater amount of the type one or slow twitch muscle fibers. Okay? And women burn far less fat during rest than men do, and that's because women just have less lean muscle mass than males do. And muscle is the most metabolically active component in your body. So the less muscle you have, the fewer calories you're burning. A majority of that daily caloric expenditure is due to what's, is due to your metabolism, what we call the basal metabolic rate. And there are a number of things that go into it, that's the amount of lean muscle mass you have, how much exercise you do and really what your body just uses to sustain life. Okay?

But the more muscle you have, the more calories you're going to burn on a regular basis. And women, generally speaking, have less muscle than men. Women also lose muscle mass at a much faster rate as they age. So all of these things are kind of combining, right? And you can see how it's really the perfect storm for retaining or carrying excess fat. Women's fat metabolism is really, it's influenced a lot more by hormones than it is for males. Right? So things like your age, your menstrual cycle, pregnancy, all of those natural things that are unique to women, they all have an effect on women's fat burning hormone profiles. So for women in particular, when you hop on the scale, and this is one of the reasons why I don't recommend weighing yourself every day just because of the psychological circle you can get yourself into wrapped around.

But for women in particular, the weight on the scale can fluctuate significantly from day to day. And that's due to water retention, due to the menstrual cycle. I mean, you name it. There are a number of things that go into that, right? And men, another point here is that men naturally produce relatively large amounts of testosterone, which serves to build muscle and burn fat. Women produce larger amounts of estrogen and progesterone. So those hormones tend to increase the storage of fat and that sounds a little bit unfair, I know, but when you think about it, I mean, this is really linked to the essential process of childbearing, which only women can do. So that's kind of where it comes from, just from an evolutionary standpoint. So the problem though is that currently the average American female now has about 40%, 40, that's 40% body fat. Female body fat percentages over about 30% start to carry some increased risks for health issues, specifically morbidity and mortality.

So how do you counter it? And I wanted to give you something simple, something to remember, something that you could take away. So I came up with an acronym called HER. That's H-E-R, okay? HER stands for HIT, which is high intensity interval training, eating and resistance training. So a couple of things to remember with each of these when it comes to HIT, this is really, high intensity interval training is where you focus on elevating your heart rate and there are short rests in there so that you can maintain exercise over a little bit longer period of time, but really the key is to getting your heart rate elevated. Now, if you

TDFit076 (Completed 05/02/19)

think back to what I talked about a little while ago, fat isn't the primary source of fuel during those high intensity sessions, but you do burn a greater amount of overall calories, meaning that you net more fat calorie burn than during high intensity interval training than you would with low intensity exercise.

Also, with interval training like this, your body continues to burn calories throughout the day and after the session. It's even been shown that up to 48 hours later, you're still burning more than you would normally and that's because of those hormones that are released during those high intensity sessions, and their effects on the utilization of fat. How much HIT should you do? Typically, I recommend one to two sessions per week. You don't want to overdo it though, because these can be pretty strenuous, but also cycle it with some lower intensity work as well. So the H in HER is HIT, high intensity interval training. The E stands for eating. So the important takeaway here is that I'm telling you to eat, not to avoid eating, particularly for females. This is particularly relevant for females. Starvation diets do more harm than good, okay? When it comes to female fat loss, and that's because the body thinks it's entering a starvation mode, for lack of a better term.

So it's going to hold on to the most calorically dense substance that it can. And that is, you guessed it, fat, because again, fat provides nine calories of energy per gram. Proteins and carbs only provide four calories of energy program. So it wants to hold on to that most caloric substance, which is fat. And then it wants, your body wants to get rid of the biggest calorie burner, which is muscle. So when you're not feeding yourself and your body goes into this starvation mode, it's saying, "Hey, let me hold onto the fat because I'm going to need that for energy and for life, and let me burn some of this muscle because muscle is actually burning the fat that I actually want to keep." So in that starvation mode, those additional calories, any additional calories that you bring in are going to be quickly stored as fat and your body's going to start to burn muscle. And that's not a place you want to be in, okay? So you want to eat.

This is one of the reasons why, you know, I've talked about intermittent fasting a couple of times here on the TD Fitness podcast, but for women in particular, you have to be careful with fasting and any kind of starvation type diets because you could get yourself into trouble with those. I would definitely recommend seeking some expert advice from a registered dietician when it comes to, if you're a female and you're thinking about experimenting with fasting or doing any kind of starvation type diet. All right? So H is for high intensity interval training. E is for eating and then the R in HER is for resistance training and I'm not just talking about lifting weights, that's why I didn't say lifting weights. I said resistance training, because that can include a whole host of other things besides just lifting weights. In fact, body weight training is one of the best things you can do. You can also use tubes or bands or a suspension straps like the TRX, so any kind of resistance training. Okay?

Now I know the typical concern here is that you don't want to look bulky. You don't want to, you know, have a muscular look a lot of times. I'm here to tell you that you're not going to put on too much muscle and look bulky just by doing some resistance training once or twice a week. You just, women just don't have the natural hormones to do that, which are testosterone and growth hormone. They don't possess that necessarily to naturally build that much muscle. Okay? Also think about it this way. I mean we've seen like female physique, body physique competitors on stage, you know, kind of like the bodybuilding contest for guys. But you know, they have these fitness competitions and physique competitions for women. Well, to get to that point, you have got to be very, very specific with your diet, with your water intake and with your exercise plan. It's not just something you're going to stumble upon by working out a couple of times a week and doing some resistance training. Okay?

So you don't have to worry about looking bulky just by doing resistance training. Okay? Yeah, that's an important point I want to get across here. But what resistance training will do for you, and this is a benefit, is it's going to increase your lean muscle mass. Again, not going to make you look bulky, but it could contribute to that toning that we talked about, right? And it directly serves to counter the loss of muscle mass in the less mass that women already have as they age, as I mentioned before. So resistance training, good thing. When you do resistance training, you want to remember to work some of the larger muscle groups if you can, it's common to try to tone those arms or legs. But think about it this way, when you're working your chest or your back or your glutes or your quads, which are the larger muscles in your body, you're actually getting exercise.

You're getting movement for those extremities like your arms and legs as well, because any pushing movement is going to be a tricep exercise, any pulling movement is going to engage the biceps. So you work those arms as well, but you're burning more calories because it requires more effort and it requires more effort to work those larger muscle groups. The same thing goes with the legs. Like I said, squats are great, kettlebell swings are great. How much do you want to do, typically shoot for eight to 12 reps a couple of sessions per week, eight to 12 reps per exercise, and you do that a couple of times a week and you should be good. So focus on strength, don't forget to give yourself rest between those sets and between those days of exercise. And that's it for the acronym, HER, H-E-R, which is HIT, eating and resistance training. It's going to be key for fat loss if you're a female.

Now, I think we're at about 35, 36 minutes, so I'm going to wrap it up here. I've kept you long enough. Just a reminder though that the show notes for this episode can be found at tdfitness.net/076. As always, thank you guys so much for tuning in. I want you to have a blessed one, Coach T, out.