

WEIGHT LOSS AND PERFORMANCE

The reality of sports is sometimes a decrease in body fat can help an athlete move faster, jump higher, and/or have more energy at practice. However, going about this the wrong way can do the opposite and compromise performance and health. For this reason, athletes wanting to lose body fat should look to accomplish this goal in the off-season. It's also important to monitor energy levels and hunger levels throughout the process to make sure the body is receiving adequate fuel.

Losing "weight" should not be the primary focus because body weight is actually made up of four components:

1. **Lean muscle mass**
2. **Fat mass**
3. **Bone**
4. **Water**

An athlete's goal should be to maintain or build lean muscle mass and lose fat mass. This does not always translate to a significant reduction in the number on a scale. Muscle mass is more dense than fat mass, meaning it takes up less space. Many athletes will have a higher body weight, but lower body fat percentage when compared to non-athletes. In fact, they might actually weigh more and look smaller. This is why body weight is not the best indicator of body composition change for athletes.

Athletes that have a goal of improving their body composition by losing body fat should have their body fat percentage tested and use that as a base for setting and achieving body composition goals. Body fat percentages can be assessed by a DEXA scan, BodPod, underwater-weighing, skin calipers, and bioelectrical impedance machines. An athletic trainer or strength coach can help athletes with setting up these types of tests as well as determining an individual healthy body fat percentage. Then athletes can work with sports dietitians to come up with meal plans to support the goal.

It is important to note that trying to achieve a body fat percentage that is too low can have negative effects on health and performance:

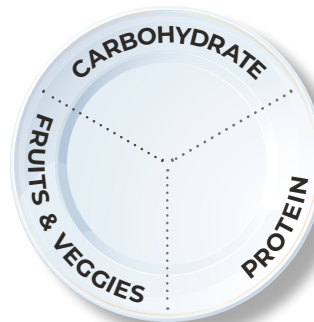
- Disrupted hormonal balances
- Low energy at practice and general fatigue
- Delayed recovery
- Higher risk for sickness and injury
- Trigger disordered eating behaviors



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Tips for Healthy Body Fat Loss:

- Eat small, more frequent meals throughout the day to help manage hunger
- Do not skip meals or snacks as that can set you up for overeating later in the day
- Eat high-quality, nutrient-rich foods like whole grain carbohydrates, lean protein, good fat, dairy, fruits, and vegetables at meals and snacks (80-90% or the majority of the time)
- Limit intake of refined carbohydrates, fried foods, baked goods, pastries, desserts, creamy sauces, spread, and dips (can include these foods in your eating plan 10-20% of the time so, less often)
- Focus on eating adequate protein to help maintain muscle mass while losing fat
- Decrease intake of high-calorie and sugar-sweetened beverages
- Eat until satisfied versus until full or stuffed



Follow the Athlete's Plate Rule

- Make $\frac{1}{3}$ of the plate whole grain carbohydrate
- Make $\frac{1}{3}$ of the plate lean protein
- Make $\frac{1}{3}$ of the plate colorful veggies
- If training less, make $\frac{1}{2}$ of the plate veggies, $\frac{1}{4}$ whole grain carbohydrate, and $\frac{1}{4}$ lean protein

