

## Does this Walker Make Me Look Fat?

### Aging and Body Fat

Clients often come my way once they notice their muffin tops or love handles expanding and not responding to fitness protocols which worked in the past. As these people age, they become increasingly exasperated with the loss of control of body fat levels. Understanding the reasons behind these changes is the first step in battling an ever expanding waist line.

To begin, let's examine dietary habits. The most obvious reason for higher body fat levels is overeating, but food choices can also make a big difference. No one ever overeats on fibrous vegetables; it's usually the carbohydrate choices that are packing on the pounds. Excess carbs coupled with high fat intake is a double whammy. Throw in other factors which tend to gain momentum as we age, and body fat accumulates. Hormones, such as cortisol, testosterone and estrogen fluctuate as our life styles push daily stress levels higher. Excess alcohol intake and use of corticosteroids can create chemical imbalances that encourage fat storage. As you can see, some factors are more easily addressed than others, but maintaining a healthy diet is an easy and effective way to slow down or even reverse the process which increases unwanted body fat from accumulating.

Secondly, maintaining lean muscle mass is essential to maintaining healthy body fat levels. If you retain or add to your lean muscle mass, you have must consume additional calories to preserve that muscle. Muscle is metabolically active and takes energy to sustain, thus creating an increased metabolism. Body fat is simply stored energy, and requires zero calories to maintain. The downward spiral begins as muscle mass is lost due to inactivity. This trend tends to accelerate as we age. Some find that while their body weight stays nearly the same, their shape changes drastically. What's occurring is muscle mass is declining, while body fat levels climb. The end product is a slower metabolism, which in the long run, makes you gradually get fatter, even eating the same number of calories as you did in the past. It's a downward spiral which eventually makes losing or even maintaining body weight levels impossible.

By age 75, the percentage of body fat typically doubles compared with what it was during young adulthood. The distribution of fat also changes, changing the shape of the torso. A healthy diet and regular exercise can help keep excessive body fat accumulation to a minimum. Studies prove that regular weight bearing and weight resistance exercise significantly slows or even halts the loss of muscle mass with aging.

The following body fat charts show the "typical" or "normal" degeneration of body composition as we age.

#### Women: Normal Range by Age

Age	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84
Body Fat %	22.5	23.9	25.8	29.1	34.3	35.8

#### Men: Normal Range by Age

Age	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84
Body Fat %	15.2	17.6	19.7	22.2	24.6	26.3

According to these charts, and this line of traditional wisdom, it is 'acceptable' for you to gain body fat as you age. This does not have to be the case! With regular exercise and a healthy diet, you should be able to maintain your lean muscle mass well into your middle years and beyond. This, in turn, will help to keep your body fat levels and body composition in check.

An active and fit 70 year old woman with a body fat level of 23% has a much lower risk of disease and aging than her counterpart with a 'normal' body fat level of 34%, not to mention the higher quality of life. Regardless if you are 20 or 70 years of age, lower body fat levels reduce a person's general health risks. Too much body fat at any age is a liability.

It's the same story; attention to a healthy diet and a sound exercise program not only helps you fight disease and aging, it will keep you fitting in your skinny jeans with less effort and frustration as the years roll by.

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Shawna is shaking up the fitness routines of several people in her Adventure Boot Camps. For more information, please visit her website.