And since we're talking about kind of a dry, scientific subject here, you'll be rewarded with cute animal videos at the end of each section so you don't fall asleep on me.

Fair warning: lots of half-naked people of all different levels of body fat in this article!

**WHAT IS BODY FAT PERCENTAGE?**

In its simplest form: **body fat is the amount of fat in your body, compared to everything else.** Everything else includes your organs, muscles, bones, tendons, water, and so on.

Both men and women carry different amounts of body fat percentage due to... you know... being different.

A super ripped male body builder who is minimizing body fat percentage could have a percentage down as low as 3-4%, while a super ripped female body builder who is minimizing body fat percentage would only get as low as 8-9%. A male athlete could be in fantastic shape and have 10% body fat, while a women at comparable level of athleticism and appearance might be at 18-20% body fat. To take the comparison to the other end of the spectrum, an overweight male at 30% will look vastly different than an overweight woman at 30%.

Feel free to take a break with this video of a **lion cub hanging out with a puppy and a rabbit.**

**WHAT'S A GOOD AMOUNT OF BODY FAT TO HAVE?**

Here is the generally accepted chart for women and men when it comes to body fat percentage:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essential</td>
<td>10-12%</td>
<td>2-4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In what I’m sure is news to nobody, body fat is essential to survival - fat protects your internal organs, provides you with necessary energy stores in times of peril, and more.

“Essential fat” means the minimal amount of fat required for survival - Anything less than this amount would mostly likely result in organ failure, but even approaching this amount of body fat is dangerous. It’s for this reason that bodybuilders, who can minimize their body fat to the “essential fat” level only do so when prepping for a show – during the rest of the year they maintain a higher body fat percentage so that they can stay healthy and function properly.

If you are looking to have that “ripped” look (dudes) and “toned” look (ladies), you’ll want your body fat percentage to hover in the “athletes” section.

If you’re looking to look healthy, I’d argue that you’ll want to be in the fitness range. Once you get into the upper ends of “acceptable” and “obese,” a decrease in body fat percentage would benefit your health.

So, determining what’s an optimal goal for you:

• If you are trying to look like Ryan Reynolds or Jessica Beil in Blade III (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhu6zhJplkgA), good luck! Aim for a body fat percentage of 6-8% (men) or 13-15% (women). Note: your athletic/strength gaining performance will most likely suffer at this percentage, and might not be worth it (http://www.vicmagary.com/blog/uncategorized/truth-of-six-pack-abs/). Your call.

• If you are interested in getting that coveted six pack, drop your body fat down to the 8-11% range for dudes and 15-17% range for women.

• If you are an athlete and interested in optimal athletic performance, aim for a body fat percentage around 15% (men) or 20% (women). NF team member Staci (http://www.nerdfitness.com/2011/07/21/meet-staci-your-new-powerlifting-super-hero/) trains much better at 20% body fat than at 15% body fat.

• If you are just interested in looking pretty good and feeling pretty good, anything less than 18% for men and anywhere in the 20-23% range for women should get you the “hey, lookin pretty good!” response from your friends 😊

• For the ladies! If you are concerned about menstruation or fertility, it has been said not to drop below 15% body fat. Although I can’t find any studies that definitively refutes or proves this, I’ve read it all over the place, so just something to be aware of. Your results may vary!

Hey, you’re still awake! You’ve unlocked the “cute baby pigmy goat jumping around” video.
WHAT DO THESE AMOUNTS LOOK LIKE?

Below, you’ll see images of what people look like with different amounts of body fat.

Men:

3-4% 6-7% 9-10%

14-15% 20-22% 30-32%

Women:

11-12% 14-15% 17-18%
A quick note: your body fat percentage is just the amount of body fat you have; it has nothing to do with the amount of muscle mass you have, which means you can have two people with the same amount of body fat percentage that look WAY different from each other. Scroll down around halfway on this article (http://www.leighpeeple.com/body-fat-pictures-and-percentages) for two great examples.

Are you surprised about what you thought and what the actual percentages look like? For a chuckle, look at THESE people who have ‘self-estimated’ their own body fat percentage (http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2008/07/30/magazine/803BODIES_index.html)! Click through the different images and compare the percentages of the people above to the people in the link. It’s clear they didn’t actually get measured, as most of them aren’t even CLOSE.

**HOW DO YOU CALCULATE YOUR BODY FAT PERCENTAGE?**

The question I get asked above ALLLLLLL others.

There are seven main methods that you can use, each with varying levels of accuracy and cost:

1) Take a Look - This might be my favorite method, although it requires a trained eye and isn’t exact. By having an accurate list of pictures and comparing a picture of yourself, you can determine somewhat closely what your body fat percentage is.
Calculate Your Percent Body Fat

**Percent Body Fat Calculator: Skinfold Method**

- **Age:** (whole number)
- **Weight:** (whole number)
- **Sex:** Male

Enter Skinfold Measurements in Millimeters:

- **Chest:** (mm)
- **Thigh:** (mm)
- **Abdomen:** (mm)

Calculate

---

Of the methods used to estimate body composition in clients, the skinfold measurement technique is probably the most commonly used by personal trainers. This technique is inexpensive, produces fairly accurate results (the standard error is 3.5%, depending on the equation applied, compared to 2.7% error for a hydrostatically determined measurement), and is relatively easy to administer once the trainer has mastered the skill of pinching the skin and measuring it with skinfold calipers.

Providing clients with an estimation of their body composition is a valuable practice because a person's level of body fat is directly correlated with health outcomes. Obesity-related diseases include heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and stroke. Thus, helping clients work toward weight loss if they are overweight or obese can have a profound positive effect on their lives. The table below provides established percent body fat norms for men and women based on various categories of health and fitness.

**Percent Body Fat Norms for Men and Women**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essential Fat</td>
<td>10-13%</td>
<td>2-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td>14-20%</td>
<td>6-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness</td>
<td>21-24%</td>
<td>14-17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>25-31%</td>
<td>18-24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Skinfold measurement is based on the belief that approximately 50% of total body fat lies under the skin, and involves measuring the thickness of the skinfolds at standardized sites. For results to be valid and reliable, the skinfold measurements must be taken properly and they should be taken by the same technician from one measurement to the next. Improper site determination and measurement are the two primary sources of error when using this method. Furthermore, skinfold measurements should not be taken after exercise because the transfer of fluid to the skin could result in overestimations.

The procedure for measuring skinfolds is as follows:

- Identify the anatomical location of the skinfold. Take all measurements on the right side of the body.
  (Optional: Mark the site with a common eyebrow pencil to expedite site relocation in repeated measures.)

- Grasp the skinfold firmly with the thumb and index finger of the left hand.

- Holding the calipers perpendicular to the site, place the pads of the calipers approximately 14 inch from the thumb and forefinger.

- Approximately one or two seconds after the trigger has been released, read the dial to the nearest 0.5 mm.

- A minimum of two measurements should be taken at each site, with at least 15 seconds between measurements to allow the fat to return to its normal thickness.

- Continue to take measurements until two measurements vary by less than 1 mm.

Calipers specifically designed for skinfold measurement (http://www.amazon.com/sh/ref=nb_ssp?ie=UTF8&tag=americanco01-20&url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=body%2Bfat%2Bcalipers) are the only equipment needed for this method of body-fat assessment, and range in cost from $3 to $300. After the measurements are taken, the data are summed and applied to an equation to estimate body fat. Of the many equations for estimating body composition, two developed by Jackson and Pollock (1985) have the smallest margin of error for the general population. These equations are based on the sum of measurements taken at three sites. Since men and women differ in their patterns of storing body-fat, different anatomical sites are measured between the sexes.

For men, the skinfold sites are:

- Chest: A diagonal skinfold taken midway on the anterior axillary line (crease of the underarm and the nipple)
- Thigh: A vertical skinfold taken midway between the hip and knee joints on the front of the thigh
- Abdomen: A vertical skinfold taken 1 inch lateral to the umbilicus

For women, the skinfold sites are:

- Triceps: A vertical fold on the back of the upper arm taken halfway between the acromion (shoulder) and olecranon (elbow) processes
- Thigh: A vertical skinfold taken midway between the hip and knee joints on the front of the thigh
- Suprailium: A diagonal fold taken at, or just anterior to, the crest of the ilium

Fat Mass and Lean Mass Calculator

After obtaining a client’s body fat percentage, it is often helpful to calculate his or her body composition in terms of fat weight and lean weight. This is crucial for re-assessment when you want to compare the loss of fat and the maintenance or gain of lean weight to the client’s original baseline values.

Ideal/Optimum Weight Calculator

After determining a client’s body composition in terms of fat weight and lean weight, you can help him or her set a realistic goal for desired body weight. Initial goal setting should be focused on small attainable objectives, such as losing 10% body weight or moving from one body fat classification category to the next. Since lean mass can increase as a response to exercise, regular body composition assessment can help clarify if increases in body weight are a result of enhanced muscle or actual body fat. It is important to understand that muscle weight can increase even when exercise participation is limited to aerobic activity. Body composition should be assessed periodically throughout an exercise program. This can provide motivating information, especially when fat weight loss appears to have plateaued.
Complete each question as best you can, by marking the best response. Your participation in this questionnaire is voluntary. However, to receive the most benefit from your report, please answer all questions.

Your results will be kept strictly confidential.

1. Social Security Number
   -

2. Gender
   - Male
   - Female

3. Age
   (At last birthday) years old

4. Are you pregnant?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Does Not Apply
   If Yes, complete questionnaire based on your health condition and lifestyle before pregnancy.

5. Height
   (without shoes)
   - feet
   - inches

6. Weight
   (without shoes)
   - pounds

7. Waist Circumference
   (in inches)
   - inches

8. What is your blood pressure now?
   - Systolic (high number)
   - Diastolic (low number)
   - I'm not sure

9. What is your total cholesterol level? (based on a blood test)
   - mg/dl
   - I'm not sure

10. What is your HDL cholesterol level? (based on a blood test)
    - mg/dl
    - I'm not sure
How would you describe your cigarette smoking habits?
- Still smoke  
  Go to question 12
- Used to smoke  
  Go to question 13
- Never smoked  
  Go to question 14

Still smoke cigarettes per day
- (Go to question 14)

How many years has it been since you smoked cigarettes on a fairly regular basis?
- Years

What was the average number of cigarettes per day that you smoked in the 2 years before you quit?
- Less than 9
- 10 - 15
- 16 - 19
- 20+

Do you smoke or use pipes?
- Yes  
- No

Do you smoke or use cigars?
- Yes  
- No

Do you smoke or use smokeless tobacco?
- Yes  
- No

How often do you use drugs or medication (including prescription drugs) which affect your mood or help you to relax?
- Almost every day
- Sometimes
- Rarely or never

How many drinks of alcoholic beverages do you have in a typical week?
(One drink = one beer, glass of wine, shot of liquor or mixed drink.)
- Drinks

How many times in the last month did you drive or ride when the driver had perhaps too much to drink?
- Times last month

In the next 12 months how many miles will you probably drive or ride in each of the following?
A. Car, truck, van or SUV
- 1 - 1,999
- 2,000 - 4,999
- 5,000 - 9,999
- 10,000 - 14,999
- 15,000 - 19,999
- 20,000 - 29,999
- 30,000 miles or more
- Do not drive or ride
B. Motorcycle
- 1 - 999
- 1,000 - 1,999
- 2,000 - 2,999
- 3,000 - 3,999
- 4,000 - 4,999
- 5,000 miles or more
- Do not drive or ride

What percent of the time do you usually buckle your safety belt when driving or riding?
- 100%
- 90 - 99%
- 80 - 89%
- less than 80%

On the average, how close to the speed limit do you usually drive?
- Within 5 mph of the speed limit
- 6 - 10 mph over the speed limit
- More than 10 mph over the speed limit
21. On a typical day how do you usually travel? (mark only one)
   - Sub-compact or compact car
   - Mid-size or full-size car, or minivan
   - Truck, van, full-size van or SUV
   - Motorcycle
   - Other

22. Each day, how many servings of food do you eat that are high in fiber, such as whole grain bread, high fiber cereal, fresh fruits or vegetables? (serving size: 1 slice bread, ½ c vegetables, 1 medium fruit, ¼ c cereal)
   - 5 - 6 servings a day
   - 3 - 4 servings a day
   - 1 - 2 servings a day
   - Rarely/never

23. Each day, how many servings of food do you eat that are high in cholesterol or fat such as fatty meat, cheese, fried foods or eggs? (serving size: 3 ½ oz meat, 1 egg, 1 oz/slice cheese)
   - 5 - 6 servings a day
   - 3 - 4 servings a day
   - 1 - 2 servings a day
   - Rarely/never

24. In the average week, how many times do you engage in physical activity (exercise or work which is hard enough to make you breathe heavily and make your heart beat faster) and is done for at least 20 minutes? Examples include running, brisk walking or heavy labor, e.g., chopping, lifting, digging, etc.
   - Less than 1 time per week
   - 1 or 2 times per week
   - 3 times per week
   - 4 or more times per week

25. How many days per week do you get 30 minutes or more (for at least 10 minutes at a time) of light to moderate physical activity? Examples include walking, mowing (push mower), slow cycling.
   - None
   - 1 day
   - 2 days
   - 3 or 4 days
   - 5 or 6 days
   - 7 days

26. How often do you floss your teeth?
   - Every day
   - Almost every day
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely or never
   - Does not apply

27. When in the sun, do you protect your skin by using a sunscreen at SPF 15 or above and by wearing adequate clothing?
   - All of the time
   - Most of the time
   - Some of the time
   - Rarely or never

28. Considering your age, how would you describe your overall physical health?
   - Excellent
   - Very Good
   - Good
   - Fair
   - Poor

29. How many hours of sleep do you usually get at night?
   - 5 hours or less
   - 6 hours
   - 7 hours
   - 8 hours
   - 9 hours or more
30. In general, how satisfied are you with your life (include personal and professional aspects)?
   - Completely satisfied
   - Mostly satisfied
   - Partly satisfied
   - Not satisfied

31. In general, how strong are your social ties with your family and/or friends?
   - Very strong
   - About average
   - Weaker than average
   - Not sure

32. Have you suffered a personal loss or misfortune in the past year?
   (For example: a job loss, disability, divorce, separation, jail term, or the death of someone close to you)
   - Yes, two or more serious losses
   - Yes, one serious loss
   - No

33. How often do you feel tense, anxious, or depressed?
   - Often
   - Sometimes
   - Rarely
   - Never

34. During the past year, how much effect has stress had on your health?
   - A lot
   - Some
   - Hardly any
   - None

35. Do you have:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>In the past</th>
<th>Have currently</th>
<th>Taking medication</th>
<th>Under medical care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allergies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Arthritis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Back Pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cancer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronic bronchitis/emphysema</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronic pain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heart problems</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Heartburn or acid reflux</td>
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<tr>
<td>High blood pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>High cholesterol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Menopause (women only)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migraine headaches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Osteoporosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleep disorder</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thyroid disease</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other condition</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Question 36
When was the last time you had these preventive services or health screenings?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Less than 1 year</th>
<th>1-2 years ago</th>
<th>2-3 years ago</th>
<th>3-4 years ago</th>
<th>5-6 years ago</th>
<th>7 or more years ago</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colon cancer screen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Flu shot</td>
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<td>Tetanus shot</td>
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<td>Blood pressure</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cholesterol</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dental exam</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>For Women Only</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pap Test</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mammogram</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breast exam by Physician or nurse</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>For Men Only</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prostate exam</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Question 37
In the past 12 months, how many times have you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1-2</th>
<th>3-5</th>
<th>6 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visited a physician's office or clinic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gone to the emergency room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed overnight in a hospital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Women (Men go to question 42)

### Question 38
Have you had a hysterectomy operation?
- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure

### Question 39
At what age did you have your first menstrual period?
- Younger than 12
- 12
- 13
- 14 or older

### Question 40
How old were you when your first child was born?
- Younger than 20
- 20 to 24
- 25 to 29
- 30 or older
- Does not apply

### Question 41
How often do you examine your breasts for lumps?
- Monthly
- Once every few months
- Rarely or never
Men (Women go to question 43)

4.2 How often do you examine your testicles for lumps?
- Monthly
- Once every few months
- Rarely or never

4.3 Current Marital Status
- Single (never married)
- Separated
- Divorced
- Married
- Widowed
- Other

4.4 Race/Origin
- White (non-Hispanic origin)
- Black (non-Hispanic origin)
- American Indian / Alaskan Native
- Hispanic
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Other

4.5 Highest level of education you have achieved
- Some high school or less
- High school graduate
- Some college
- College graduate
- Post graduate or professional degree

4.6 Expected household income this year
- Less than $35,000
- $35,000 - $49,999
- $50,000 - $74,999
- $75,000 - $99,999
- $100,000 or more

4.7 In the next six months, are you planning to make any changes to keep yourself healthy or improve your health?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
<th>Not Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase physical activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lose weight</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce alcohol use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit or cut down smoking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduce fat / cholesterol intake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower blood pressure</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower cholesterol level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Cope better with stress</td>
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By Jim F in Fashion, Figure, and Shape, body shape, hourglass

If you thought that body shapes had changed over the last 50 years – you’d be correct.

A new study has researched the body shapes of 6000 women and concluded that the fashion industry is woefully out of sync with reality.

The research found that although only 8 per cent of women now had the sort of hourglass figure flaunted by curvaceous 1950s film stars such as Sophia Loren, designers and manufacturers continued to make clothes to fit a slim-line version of that figure.

The different shapes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hourglass</td>
<td>8.40%</td>
<td>Bust and hips are basically the same circumference - though the bust can be up to 1 inch larger than the hips. The waist is less than 9.25% smaller than the bust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoon</td>
<td>20.92%</td>
<td>Where the hips are 2&quot; or more larger than the bust. The waist is less than 9.25&quot; smaller than the bust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rectangle</td>
<td>46.12%</td>
<td>Where the bust and hips are basically the same circumference. The waist is less than 9&quot; smaller than the bust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangle</td>
<td>13.83%</td>
<td>The bust is 3.6&quot; or larger than the hips and the waist is less than 9&quot; smaller than the bust.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results are from 6318 women scanned

The changing figure size is a source of consternation for many fashion designers. Should they design clothes that fit the people – or rail on about how women are too big?

Sophia Loren (1955)
The quintessential hourglass