

Gear Guide: A Simple Way to Measure Body Fat at Home

Our senior fitness editor tests the latest workout products—so you don't have to



By [Su Reid-St. John](#)

I'd been thinking recently that knowing how much I weigh is all well and good, but it doesn't tell me about the *kind* of weight I'm carrying. How much fat is burdening this body of mine? Do I have an excess amount of it, dragging me inexorably toward unappealing destinations like heart disease and diabetes? Since I don't belong to a gym or have a trainer on hand to perform such calculations, I chose to do the deed at home (twice!) with Sequoia Fitness' new [Defender Body Fat Caliper](#) and [Warrior Digital Body Mass Caliper](#).

I last had my [body fat measured](#) several years ago, before I began working with weights on a regular basis, and my percentage was in something the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) not so tactfully calls the "over-fat" range. I've since developed the sense to follow my own fitness-editor advice and have been strength training three times a week pretty regularly for the past year or so. Adding that to my workout routine has helped me finally lose that last, stubborn 5 pounds—and I was eager to see what sort of body-fat shrinkage it might've led to as well. Time to bring on the calipers!

The Defender is the more basic of Sequoia's new calipers. The instructions show three areas to measure; for women, it's the hip, thigh, and tricep. After setting the gauge on the caliper, you grasp a skinfold per the directions and squeeze just until the little indicator turns green. The instructions suggest doing it several times to get the most accurate reading. My three hip readings ranged from 15 to 20 millimeters, so that seemed like a good idea. (I ended up taking the average of the three readings.)

My thigh readings had a similar range. The third measurement, along my right tricep, was impossible to do by myself—I couldn't see the little monitor to tell when it turned green—so I roped my husband into helping. (He later tried doing his own measurements and needed my help with the chest reading.) Then I added the three numbers together, squinted to try to make out the super-tiny type on the Body Fat Wheel Chart (folks over 40, beware!), finally managed to match my sum with my age, and voilà: There was my body fat percentage, which I was happy to find now falls squarely within ACSM's "normal" range (a marked improvement over my last measurement—score one for [strength training](#)).

The next day, I put the Warrior to the test. I was stymied at first when the battery compartment wouldn't stay shut; I finally had to tape it. That small hurdle overcome, though, it was a cinch to use. Once you punch in your age, weight, and gender, you're ready to take your readings (same places as with the Defender). You clamp until you hear a beep—no green indicator to watch for. I still needed help on the triceps measurement, but overall it was easier to use than the Defender. The results (once again in the "normal" range) come up after you

“accept” the third measurement. You can even store them so you can check your progress the next time you measure.

This gadget also gives you a “lean body mass” measurement—in other words, how much of your weight is something other than fat (think muscle, bones, etc.). Oddly, the instruction booklet, which gives body fat ranges, doesn’t say anything about interpreting the lean body mass number. As a result, I didn’t find it that helpful—except as a future means to scare away a telemarketer. (“No subscription for me, thanks, but did you know I have 31 pounds of body fat?”)

It’s true that calipers aren’t the most accurate way to measure body fat (getting a DEXA scan at a lab or hospital is, but it’ll set you back several hundred dollars each time you do it), mostly because the person wielding them might not be doing it exactly right. But really, unless you’re an athlete, does it truly matter if your reading is a couple of percentage points off the mark? Not in my book. I’ll stick with the Sequoia calipers to do the job—making sure, of course, to keep some Scotch tape and a magnifying glass close by.

Pros: Both calipers are an inexpensive, relatively simple way to measure body fat at home. The Warrior is very user-friendly, and it also measures lean body mass.

Cost: \$27 at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) for the Warrior; \$16 at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) for the Defender.

Extra tip: For the most accurate results, make sure you’re well hydrated before you take your readings.