

PDF BONUS

Skinny Fat to Fit

The ultralight guide to
transform your physique

Despite seeing many 'one-shoe-fits-all' solutions out there, there are different categories of skinny-fat individuals—three, to be exact. Each requires a different approach, and you should follow the plan that best suits your current situation.

How to Fix The Skinny-Fat Look As a Complete Beginner

You're new to training. You've never lifted weights or have only done so for short periods in the past. You don't have much muscle mass, but your body fat percentage is high, and you look skinny-fat.

This is where most guys and girls start. The great thing about this stage is that you have the opportunity to pull off a body recomposition (build muscle and lose fat at the same time). Here, you get to enjoy newbie gains: your body isn't used to the stress of training and is highly susceptible to positive adaptations, even if you're not eating too many calories.

How to Train During This Period

I typically prescribe at least some heavy lifting in a program, but you should wait as a gym newbie. When you're first starting, it's essential to focus on learning the movements before adding much weight to the bar.

Too often, beginners load up the bar and lift with poor technique. This prevents them from training the right muscles well and increases the risk of injuries and aches.

For the first few months of training, you should focus on a few core movements and gradually improve your technique. As a beginner, you'll be able to improve your strength regularly while maintaining good form.

If you're interested in a simple and effective beginner program, [I've put together one for you.](#)

Here are some instructional videos on how to perform the basic lifts:

- [Flat barbell bench press](#)
- [Conventional deadlift](#)
- [Sumo deadlift](#)
- [Barbell back squat](#)
- [Overhead barbell press](#)
- [Pull-up/Chin-up](#)
- [Barbell row](#)
- [Pendlay row](#)

Learn How to Make Your Nutrition Work For You

Let's face it:

No matter how good your training plan is, your nutrition is what dictates change. If you don't pay careful attention, you won't see the results you hope for.

Since your goal is to lose fat and get rid of the skinny-fat look, you need to be in a calorie deficit: consuming fewer calories than you burn each day. Once the newbie phase is over, building muscle while eating in a deficit will become increasingly more difficult. But, for the first few months, you can make significant gains.

To cover your nutrition well, you'll have to calculate your caloric needs and track them alongside protein. Start by calculating your BMR: the number of calories your body burns every day at rest.

Women

$BMR = 655 + (4.35 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (4.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (4.7 \times \text{age in years})$

$BMR = 655 + (9.6 \times \text{weight in kg}) + (1.8 \times \text{height in cm}) - (4.7 \times \text{age in years})$

Men

$BMR = 66 + (6.23 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (12.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (6.8 \times \text{age in years})$

$BMR = 66 + (13.7 \times \text{weight in kg}) + (5 \times \text{height in cm}) - (6.8 \times \text{age in years})$

Once you have your BMR, it's time to use the below activity multiplier to find what your TDEE is: the number of total calories your body burns each day.

- Sedentary (little or no exercise): Calorie-Calculation = **BMR x 1.2**
- Lightly active (light exercise/sports 1-3 days/week): Calorie-Calculation = **BMR x 1.375**
- Moderately active (moderate exercise/sports 3-5 days/week): Calorie-Calculation = **BMR x 1.55**
- Very active (hard exercise/sports 6-7 days a week): Calorie-Calculation = **BMR x 1.725**
- Extra active (very hard exercise/sports & physical job or 2x training): Calorie-Calculation = **BMR x 1.9**

Now, calculate a moderate deficit of 250 to 400 calories. Of the three macronutrients, I recommend keeping track of protein alone: get around 0.8 grams per pound of body weight.

Here is an example:

Mary is 29-years-old, weighs 135 pounds, and is 5'7" (about 67 inches). So, to use the above formula:

$BMR = 655 + (4.35 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (4.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (4.7 \times \text{age in years})$

$BMR = 655 + (4.35 \times 135) + (4.7 \times 67) - (4.7 \times 29)$

$BMR = 1421 \text{ calories}$

Let's also say that Mary is moderately active. She does moderate exercise three to five times per week. In this case, we will use the 1.55 activity multiplier. So:

$$1421 \times 1.55 = 2200 \text{ calories}$$

Now, let's apply a 300-calorie deficit to this number:

$$2200 - 300 = 1900 \text{ calories}$$

This will be Mary's starting point. Also, because she weighs 135 pounds, she should aim for around 108 grams of protein per day.

With that said, keep in mind that these calculations only give us a starting point, and we should then monitor our progress (more on that below) and make adjustments as needed.

How Long Does This Period Last?

You should follow this path for as long as you can make progress. This will vary from person to person, but it usually lasts anywhere from three to six months.

Once the newbie gains are gone, your lifts will most likely stall. Being in a caloric deficit won't cut it anymore. At this point, you will have two options:

1. Continue with your caloric deficit and get leaner.
2. Increase your calories up and go into a small surplus to start building muscle.

(I wrote about the recovery diet more in the next section. You can learn the exact process and apply it if you decide to increase your caloric intake.)

How to Approach Being Skinny Fat After You've Just Lost Some Weight

You're new to training. You might have spent some time playing around with weights, but your primary focus has been cardio for weight loss. You don't have much muscle on your frame, but you don't like how you look after your weight loss period.

The primary difference from the previous category is that you had to lose weight to become skinny fat.

This is another common category of skinny-fat people, and I was once in this same position, clueless as to what I should do. If the above describes you well and you can answer with a yes to the three statements below, then you fall into this category and should read on.

1) *"I've lost quite a bit of weight recently, and everyone is complimenting me on my great results. Yet, when I look at myself in the mirror shirtless, I don't particularly like what I see."*

2) *"I have been in the gym during my weight loss, but I didn't do a lot of lifting. My main focus was on cardio."*

3) *"I went about my weight loss in a typical manner: clean eating paired up with a lot of cardio work."*

This category is a bit trickier than the first one because of one thing:

You've already spent a lot of time in a calorie deficit. You've experienced the adverse effects of dieting: a lower metabolic rate, higher hunger levels, food focus, and such. Staying in a calorie deficit is not a wise decision right now.

The next best route for you is a recovery diet. Whether you want to lose more fat or start building a solid muscle base, this is a mandatory step, so don't skip it. Also, if you haven't been tracking your calories so far, don't worry.

Calculate your TDEE with the above formula and activity multiplier, and start eating around that number. Keep your calories there for up to ten days and weigh yourself every morning on an empty stomach.

Do a waist measurement now and after seven days. Take a few progress photos now and after seven days: one front, one side, and one back, all in a relaxed state. Take them at the same time of day, using the same poses, and in the same light.

The goal here is to determine whether you're eating at maintenance. If you keep losing weight after seven days, bump your calories by about 150 and go for another seven to ten days.

Once you're at maintenance and eat that way for a while, you will allow your body to recover and get back to normal:

- Your hormones will begin to normalize after the diet;
- You will restore your muscle and liver glycogen stores;

Most importantly, you will put yourself in a better position to decide what you want to do next.

The entire process should take you up to six weeks. At that point, you will have two options:

- 1) Add a small calorie surplus of 200-250 and start building muscle over time.
- 2) Add a moderate calorie deficit of 250-400 calories and focus on further losing fat.

At this point, it mostly comes down to personal preference. You're at a great spot to start building muscle, but you can also keep losing fat.

How to Approach Being Skinny Fat If You've Got Some Lifting Experience

You've put some time under the bar, and you've achieved some muscle and strength gain. Still, your body fat percentage is high, and you're skinny-fat because you haven't built much muscle yet.

This category is different from the above two in a few significant ways:

- 1) I assume that you've been practicing compound lifts, and your technique is decent. If not, you're at least proficient in some resistance exercises. You can also check out the videos I posted above.
- 2) I assume you've gained some muscle thanks to your newbie status, and you're slowly adding weight on the bar.
- 3) I assume you keep track of your calories and protein. I also guess that you have a good idea of how much weight you've gained in the last few months.

This is an excellent place to start a fat loss phase because you now have some muscle mass to justify it. Also, some folks in this situation might experience a degree of body recomposition. It's difficult to say how experienced you need to get for body recomposition to become borderline impossible.

By doing this, you will set yourself up for a fantastic bulking cycle afterward because you will be leaner, which carries some benefits. Namely:

- You can bulk for a bit longer. In other words, you have a slightly longer 'runway' before you get overly-fluffy.
- You can see progress better because you won't have a thick layer of fat covering your muscles.
- You get to look better thanks to having less fat on your frame. Let's face it: we all care about this one.

Now, let's take a look at what you need to do here.

How to Eat During This Phase

The biggest mistake most people make when trying to lose fat is to jump headfirst into the process. They immediately add a lot of cardio and cut their calories too much, which sets them up for failure from the start.

To avoid this mistake, you need to pace yourself. Start by decreasing your calorie intake gradually over a few weeks. For example, if you're currently eating around 3,600 calories per day, don't immediately drop them to 2,000. Instead, drop them to approximately 3,200. Monitor your progress for a couple of weeks and see how your body responds.

From there, drop them by another 200 and go for another week. Monitor progress, and if you find that you're still not losing any fat, lower your calories by another 150-200.

Within three weeks, you should be in a calorie deficit and losing fat. The goal of this is simple:

Find the highest number of calories you can lose significant fat on. This sets you up for success because you have room to decrease your calories further once weight loss inevitably slows down. Once your fat loss plateaus, you can either:

- Decrease calorie intake by 100 per day and see if that gets you going again
- Start incorporating cardio and keep your calorie intake the same

But to achieve this, the process needs to be gradual. As far as diet composition goes, you should mostly track your protein - aim for around 0.8 grams per pound of body weight. For nutritional choices and such, I recommend adopting a flexible dieting mindset.

Progress photos, circumference measurements, and morning weigh-ins are valuable tools that will help you better track your progress. We'll go over these more in-depth below.

How to Train

A big misconception about fat loss training is that you need to use light weights and do tons of repetitions to 'bring out definition.' This is a huge mistake.

Sure, training with lighter weights has its benefits. But you shouldn't base your entire training program on that and completely disregard the other repetition ranges. The reason for that is simple:

Training exclusively with light weights will lead to a lot more muscle and strength loss than you need to endure. If you instead use a mixture of intensities and repetition ranges, you'll be able to retain more muscle and strength in the process.

There are two big reasons why using only light weights is counterproductive:

- Spot reduction is a myth. Feeling a burn in your muscles doesn't mean that you'll burn more fat in that area.
- Muscle retention while dieting depends on two factors: consuming enough protein and putting your muscles under heavy loads.

My main idea here is that you should keep your training the same, at least initially. Use the same weights, repetition ranges, exercises, and overall program. As far as your training volume and frequency go:

Being in a calorie deficit will lead to lower energy levels and a decreased ability to recover from training. There is no way around this. Once you've been dieting for several weeks, doing high-frequency and high-volume training won't cut it anymore.

Aside from regular deload weeks, you should also gradually reduce your volume across all workouts. You can even remove one to two training days (depending on your training frequency) and combine more muscle groups. Here is an example of volume reduction:

Let's say that you're doing 16 sets for chest, 16 for back, 18 for your entire lower body, 12 for shoulders, and 9 for biceps and triceps each. Here, you can drop two working sets from each body part and see how it impacts you within a couple of weeks. It might not seem like much, but that simple change will reduce your overall volume by 12 sets.

I recommend getting rid of sets from your accessory and isolation exercises and keeping your compound lifts the same.

Here is how you can reduce your training frequency:

If you follow a typical four-day split but find it hard to keep up, knock one day off and combine more muscle groups into fewer workouts. For example, say that your current split looks like this:

Monday - Chest and triceps
Tuesday - Back and biceps
Wednesday - off
Thursday - Legs
Friday - Shoulders and traps
Saturday & Sunday - off

You can transition to a three-day split:

Monday – Chest and triceps + *shoulders*
Tuesday - off
Wednesday – Back and biceps + *traps*
Thursday - off
Friday - Legs
Saturday & Sunday - off

Notice how we added the shoulder work on Monday and the trap work on Wednesday.

If you usually follow a five-day split, you have more flexibility to combine muscle groups and downsize to a four-day split for a while. You can do a [push/pull/legs](#) or [upper/lower program](#) here.

How to Track Your Skinny Fat Progress Effectively

While we haven't gone over progress tracking thus far, this process is of enormous importance. Many people spend countless hours in the gym, yet they can't find a few minutes to fill in their workout log or take a couple of progress pictures. Without data, you won't know how far you've come. Even worse, you won't know whether your current plan works.

Tracking your progress is even more important for fat loss. It gives you a much better understanding of whether you're on the right track or need to adjust things. For example, eating a mere 200 calories more than you should every day can significantly slow down your fat loss.

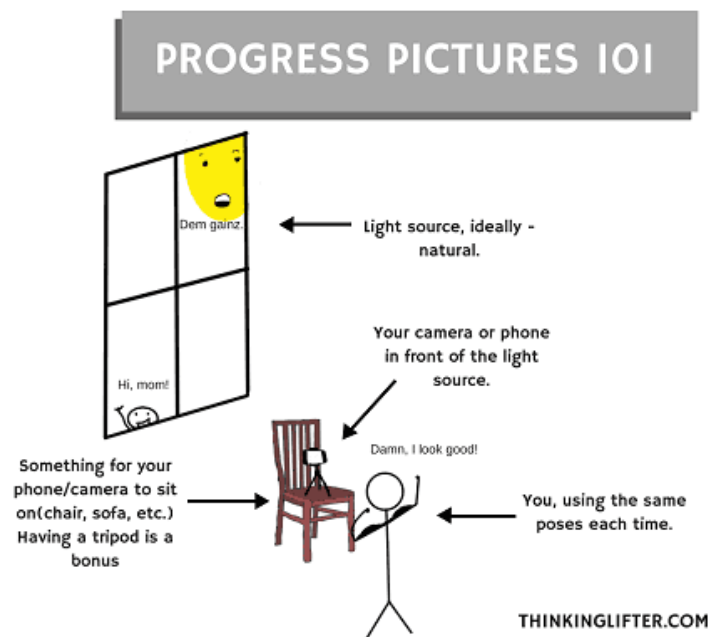
Here is how to track your progress effectively:

1. Progress photos

I recommend taking a set of up to ten photos of yourself to have a good understanding of where you begin. Take photos of your back, front, and side in a relaxed and flexed state.

After that, take progress photos every two to three weeks. Take them at the same time of day (ideally, in the morning), under the same light, and while using the same poses.

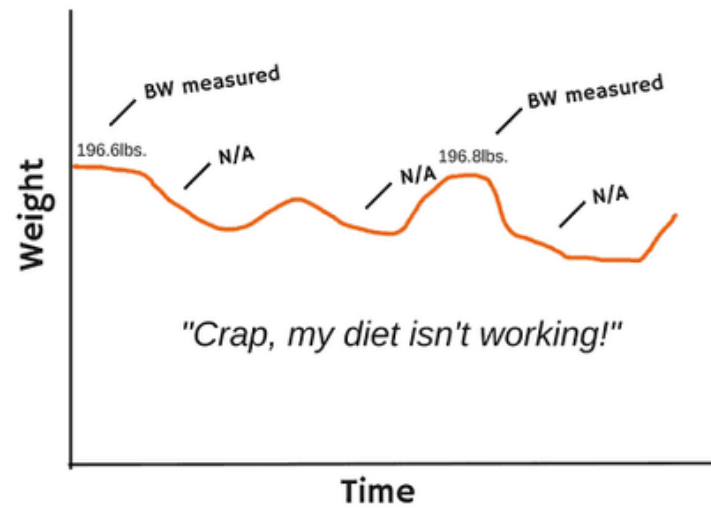
No matter what your starting point is, taking the photos in the same way each time will give you a good idea of how your body is changing.



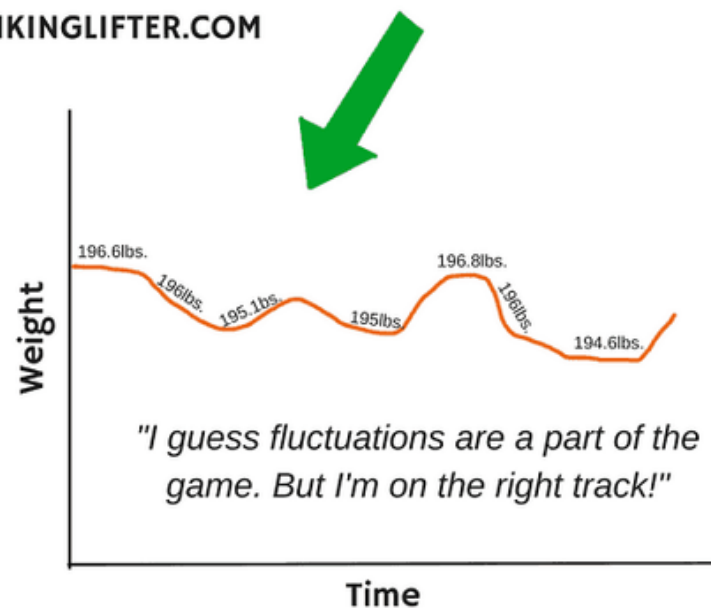
2. Weigh-ins

Body weight can also give you valuable insight into how your body is changing over time. To make weigh-ins effective, you should take several per week (at least four) and calculate the weekly average. As you wake up in the morning, go to the bathroom, and step on the scale afterward.

Write down the exact value each time and then calculate the week's average. Daily fluctuations are normal and expected, so comparing changes from week to week will give you much more accurate data.



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3. Circumference measurements

Aside from visual and body weight changes, taking measurements of key areas on your body will help further tell you how you're doing. For example, if you find that your weigh-ins stall for a couple of weeks but your waist gets smaller in that same time, you can conclude that you're losing fat, but that maybe you're retaining more water, which is masking your progress.

Like the previous tracking methods, I recommend doing this in the morning on an empty stomach. That way, you can avoid bloating that can occur later in the day and skew your results.

I recommend taking measures of the following:

- Left and right upper arm
- Chest (at nipple line)
- Two inches above the navel
- At the navel
- Hips
- Left and right thighs

Here is [a comprehensive video](#) by Scott Herman on how to take accurate measurements.

As for the frequency, I recommend taking measurements every two to three weeks, much like you would take progress photos.

4. Gym performance

Tracking your workouts is also essential as it gives you further insight into how things are going. Plus, seeing that you're doing better can be a huge motivator in the long run.

You can get yourself a workout log or a plain notebook. It doesn't need to be anything fancy. Write down the date, what exercises you've done, the number of sets, and the number of reps.

I use an app called Evernote. I've created separate notes that represent each workout. On top of each note, I write the focus of my workout (e.g., deadlift session, squat session, etc.) and the date. On workouts where I do bodyweight movements (such as pull-ups, dips, etc.) I also write my morning weigh-in. You don't have to be as detail-oriented if you don't want to.

Below that, I list each exercise along with the number of sets and reps that I do. On the compound lifts, I also record my rate of perceived exertion (RPE) and whether I'm wearing a belt or not (for the squat and deadlift).

Once the training week is done, I sit down for about 15 minutes and write down each workout in my notebook. After that, all I have to do is revisit each note, change the date, adjust loads on some exercises, and I'm done.

