

# THE COLOR OF FAT

**Body fat** gets a bad rap. But it's essential for protecting our organs and storing energy. You may think you know the color of human fat from looking at cuts of meat. But human fat is different from that of a cow or pig. Here's your field guide to human body fat.

Discover the different colors, what they mean, and which kind of fat **can kill you.**

## White

**Most fat cells** in your body are white. These cells soak up dietary fat and store it for future energy needs. But they can also do something crazy. Feed them too much dietary fat, and they will keep getting bigger – growing and growing to the point of dangerous dysfunction.

## Yellow

OK, truthfully, most of those white cells **really look yellow.** Like schmaltz. (The Yiddish word for chicken fat). Why? Because humans can't quickly metabolize the yellow carotene found in vegetables and grains. So carotene migrates to our fat cells and settles there.

## Brown

**Brown fat cells** interact with white fat cells to burn energy in cold weather and create heat. Lean people have more brown fat than non-lean people. Some scientists think that if they can find a way to stimulate brown fat cells, they can help people lose weight. **(They're working on it.)**

## Beige

**Beige fat cells** are mixed in with white fat. We actually have more beige fat than brown fat. Beige fat cells are inactive until you get cold. Then they start burning energy like brown fat cells, only not as well. Beige cells are being studied for their potential to help regulate insulin and protect organs like the liver.

## Belly

**OK, "belly" is not a color.** But you need to know about belly fat. It's dangerous. Growing behind and pushing out the abdominal wall, it causes the classic "pot belly." It also packs itself around internal organs and, like an evil gland, starts pumping harmful chemicals that throw your metabolism off balance with disastrous effects. Excess belly fat is linked to heart attacks, diabetes, stroke, breast cancer and many other conditions.

## FAT FACTS Q & A

### Q. WHAT HAPPENS TO BODY FAT WHEN YOU LOSE WEIGHT?

A. You exhale it. Fat is metabolized into carbon dioxide and a little water. Aerobic exercise increases your exhalation rate, causing you to lose more fat.

### Q. I HAVE A BIG STOMACH, BUT IT'S HARD AS ROCK.

That's not all muscle. Your stomach is as hard as a rock because all the fat is packed under the abdominal wall. This is incredibly dangerous (see "Belly fat" above).

### Q. IS BODY FAT GOOD FOR ANYTHING?

A. You'd die without body fat. It stores crucial energy, serves as insulation, protects certain organs, and literally helps hold cells together. But too much of a good thing can also be fatal. Lose your excess body fat by exercising more and following the Mediterranean diet. **(Don't worry. If you're overweight or obese like 60% of Americans, you're in almost no danger of dying from too little body fat.)**

#### REFERENCES

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