

## How to sell body fat calipers: Measuring fat loss can motivate

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People still live by the scale. The problem is, however, the scale only measures people's total body weight and not how much lean or muscle tissue compared to how much body fat they have. Sure, your customers tell you they want to lose weight, but if you queried closer, you betcha most would narrow that down to losing fat: They want to lose the belly, the jiggle under the arms, or the extra layer on the hips.

You've sold them the treadmill, the weight set, or the bike, maybe the yoga mat and the stretch bands, but how do people know they are actually losing fat as they progress in a program? Their happiness and better health is not about their total weight, but about how much fat they are carrying.

There are a number of ways to measure body fat. Considered the most accurate, underwater or hydrostatic weighing can be quite expensive and complicated, not to mention difficult for the average person to find. There are different methods of so-called bioelectrical impedance where electrical currents are sent through a body to measure its density, but the accuracy depends on many factors and the numbers can fluctuate drastically.

That leaves you with body-fat calipers -- simple and inexpensive devices that anybody with some practice can use to monitor their progress.

### **How they work**

Compared to being weighed under water or having an electrical current shot through somebody, calipers pinch the outer layer of skin and the so-called "subcutaneous" fat, which is the layer of fat directly under the skin. Researchers over the years have developed a range of complicated formulas to determine total body fat percentage based on how thick the pinched layer is at one, three, five or more sites of the body. The readings -- one or more -- are put into an equation, which crunches the numbers and comes up with an average body fat reading. But the numbers put into the equation are what can make or break the final reading. And pinch practice does make perfect.

### **Consistency and practice**

With any customer, it's important to stress that it may take a few practice sessions over a few days to try taking readings at different places. A user needs to get the feel of how hard and how far to squeeze the calipers to get consistent readings. That's the real key in using

less-expensive calipers: The number itself may have a error of several percentages, from lower to higher, but if someone has his or her readings taken by the same person, in the same way, at the same time of day, then he or she can track percentages and note a trend. That trend -- are the readings generally going up or down? -- is what will help your customers gauge success in their fitness and health programs. A user can also just track the thickness readings for another point of comparison, rather than translating them into a percentage.

### **Setting up and selling a body fat measurement category in your store**

From price to type, there are several points for a retailer to consider. Knowing your customer demographic will help.

**1. Price** – Professional grade calipers can run \$200 and up, but for the everyday home exerciser, one for about \$20 to \$50 can work just fine, especially with a little practice. Stocking one lower-priced one and one moderately priced caliper can give customers something to compare and creates a category in the store.

**2. Type of measurement** – Less expensive types are manual, meaning the user must squeeze a plastic lever to the point of resistance, then read the number and cross-check it to a chart. A digital device will automatically show the number on a read-out once the user has squeezed the levers to a certain point.

- A manual squeeze caliper could be perceived as less accurate and more variable. If somebody is particularly low in fat or very high in fat, they could be less accurate since it measures based on a reading from one place on the body and people carry their fat differently -- more in one place or another. Plus, the user must cross-check the reading to a chart to determine his or her fat percentage.

- A digital caliper can be more accurate partly because it takes readings from several places on the body. Plus, it stores readings and automatically calculates the person's percent of body fat. They can also track results over time, sometimes for several people.

**3. Comfort and configuration** – Different types will have handles and levers shaped different ways. The caliper should fit in your hand comfortably and the read-out or markings should be easy to read. Some have beeps or tones that indicate when a user has the right pressure on the fat layer pinched, which can be helpful.

#### **Add-on sale**

Keeping a caliper at the counter to show to customers could help them understand how it works and how it could benefit them. A salesperson could even do a practice pinch on customers to demonstrate the use and feel. Consumers can then see it doesn't hurt and that it's easy to operate. Once customers have spent hundreds to thousands of dollars on motors, belts and plates of iron, a caliper is a pretty inexpensive way to help them track progress to determine how well they are doing on their fitness and health program. And if they perceive progress, they can easily become repeat customers.

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**Thanks again for reading and for your support of SNEWS®! We look forward to hearing from you anytime.**

Cheers,

**Michael Hodgson & Therese Iknoian**

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