

We're talking about...

Are you skinny fat?

Think you're naturally slim? You may not be as healthy as you believe. Read on...

Skinny fat: sounds like some fancy kind of coffee, right? If only! Nope, 'skinny fat' is the not-so-complimentary term conjured up by personal trainers to describe someone who is slender but has zero muscle tone. They might look incredible when dressed, appear the picture of health, claim they can eat what they want and boast they've never had to set foot in a gym to maintain their slim silhouette, but lurking beneath those clothes is a soft, flabby body with little definition.

And in a world where fashion designers, models and magazines perpetuate the idea that fat is bad, muscley is masculine and slim is good, the skinny fat look is growing in popularity among fashion- and body-conscious women. But, say health experts, it's a body shape that should come with a serious wellbeing warning.

It's what's inside that counts

'Just because you are skinny on the outside, doesn't mean you are not fat on the inside,' says Lenka Halgasova, personal trainer and fitness manager of London gym the Reebok Club. 'Many slim women might not feel the need to exercise regularly and eat healthily, but they're putting their bodies at serious risk of life-threatening illnesses as they get older, even if they are not visibly overweight.'

Cream cakes and other high-fat goodies might never seem to show up on a skinny fat woman's hips or thighs, but you can be sure they'll be storing them internally in the form of highly toxic visceral fat which wraps itself around the body's major organs, putting them at risk of Type 2 diabetes and cardiac problems, such as heart attacks. And without regular exercise to keep this fat in check and give the heart a cardiovascular workout, the problems are likely to be compounded.

A question of balance

Skinny fat women who steer clear of the gym and avoid weight training for fear of 'bulking up' are also mistakenly adding to their future health and ageing woes. 'For good health and fitness, and a lean body,

‘Experts say it's a body shape that should come with a health warning’

you need a balanced ratio of body fat to muscle mass,' explains Halgasova. 'Good muscle tone also helps support your skin and keep you looking pert to avoid that saggy, baggy look as you get older.'

'Slim women who don't exercise might think they look great at the moment,' says Halgasova, 'but you can only cheat looking good and being healthy for so long.'

Good health isn't far away

The good news is it's never too late to pull yourself out of the skinny fat trap. According to Halgasova, all it often takes is a little more organisation. 'While some women avoid the gym and eat what they want, others end up eating unhealthy and shunning exercise because their hectic lifestyles seemingly don't allow the time,' she says. 'But with a bit of planning and effort, you can get back in good health pretty quickly.'

The message is loud and clear: you can't always judge the state of your health by how good you look in the mirror. Remember, it's what's going on inside that counts.



AVOID THE SKINNY FAT TRAP

Try these tips from Lenka Halgasova:

- **Get skinny FIT** – with good nutrition and regular exercise, you'll have a toned, lean, sexy body and healthy skin, hair and nails.
- **Train with weights** – mix cardio and weight-bearing exercise during training sessions to burn fat and build muscle mass.
- **Plan regular balanced meals** – eat protein regularly to support healthy muscle tissue growth.
- **Calm down** – a hectic lifestyle can lead to skipped meals, junk food on the go and cancelled gym sessions.

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