

Calf Circumference

Calf circumference can be used as a marker of muscle mass in clinical practice.

Materials required:

- Flexible tape measure (or piece of string and ruler if you do not have access to a tape measure).

Procedure:

- Have the participant seated with knees at a 90° angle and feet flat to the floor OR standing with feet flat on the ground.
- Legs apart and relaxed.
- Calf exposed.

How to measure:

- Place tape measure/string around the calf and move up and down without compressing subcutaneous tissue to locate the maximum circumference.
- Take the measure to the nearest 1 mm. If using a string and ruler, measure the length of the string along the ruler to get the measurement.
- Complete 3 measurements on each side. The largest measurement is used for the assessment.

Example Cut Points:

At risk of sarcopenia/malnutrition:

Female	≤ 33 cm
Male	≤ 34 cm

Adjustments for BMI:

BMI	Adjustment
18.5-24.9 kg/m ²	0 cm
25-29 kg/m ²	-3 cm
30-39 kg/m ²	-7 cm
>39 kg/m ²	-12 cm

Note: BMI-adjustment should not be applied to individuals with a BMI <18.5kg/m² who are suspected of having weight or muscle losses, as low muscle mass could be hidden if the adjustment factor is applied.

Frequently asked questions:

Q: Should calf circumference be measured sitting or standing?

A: Calf circumference can be measured either sitting or standing.

Q: Should the participant take their shoes off?

A: Flat soled shoes can remain on.

Key references:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey questionnaire (or examination protocol, or laboratory protocol). 2006. Available from: <https://wwwn.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhanes/1999-2000/manuals/bm.pdf>

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