

On Skin Changing

Being a Most Concise and Helpful Guide to the Noble Arts of Wild Shaping and Polymorphing

Wild shaping — and polymorphing more generally — is one of the more complicated things a player of Pathfinder is likely to deal with in the course of running a character. This guide is meant to ease the process by laying out the steps for polymorphing a PC (or a creature). This guide will cover only the rules in the Pathfinder role playing game. Other rule sets will not be covered.

Overall, the process works like this:

0. Adjustments for Unusually Sized Base Creatures
 1. Ability Scores
 2. Size Bonuses and Penalties
 3. Equipment
 4. Remove Native Abilities
 5. Add New Abilities

Step 0: Ability Adjustments for Unusually Sized Base Creatures

Table: Pre-Spell Ability Adjustments

Creature's Original Size	Str	Dex	Con	Adjusted Size
Fine	+6	-6	—	Small
Diminutive	+6	-4	—	Small
Tiny	+4	-2	—	Small
Large	-4	+2	-2	Medium
Huge	-8	+4	-4	Medium
Gargantuan	-12	+4	-6	Medium
Colossal	-16	+4	-8	Medium

If the native size of the creature you are adjusting is Small or Medium, proceed to step 1.

Polymorph spells grant size bonuses and penalties to your abilities. These spells were written with the assumption that you're starting from a Small or Medium base creature, because that's what most PCs are. If you're starting with some *other* size, then your abilities need to be adjusted before the spell's bonuses and penalties are figured in. Use the adjacent table.

If you are Fine, Tiny, or Diminutive, your ability scores will be adjusted to make you equivalent to a Small creature.

If you're Large, Huge, Gargantuan, or Colossal, your scores will be adjusted to make you equivalent to a Medium creature.

Please note that your final abilities (and size) will almost certainly change again before the polymorph process is over, so don't go re-figuring all your stats just yet.

Step 1: Ability Scores

When you polymorph, your ability scores will change. These changes are detailed in the description of the spell that you're casting. Wild shape, and similar abilities, refer to and function like spells, and specify which one they're using in the ability description. For example, the wild shaping ability of a 4th level druid uses *beast form I*, while a sixth level druid uses *beast form II* or *elemental body I* depending on whether you're turning into an animal or an elemental.

Apply the changes listed in the spell to your ability scores, and then update the rest of your stats accordingly. If you have a character sheet that automatically adjusts itself to your current ability score, this may be done for you. If you're doing it manually, here is a brief reminder of everything that might change:

- **Strength** governs melee attacks, damage, Climb, and Swim.
- **Dexterity** governs initiative, armor class, ranged attacks, Reflex saves, and the following skills:
 - Acrobatics
 - Disable Device
 - Escape Artist
 - Fly
 - Ride
 - Stealth
- **Constitution** governs hit points and Fortitude saves.

For each two points of change to an ability, the stats that it governs will change by 1. So, for example, a +4 bonus to CON nets you an extra 2 hit points for each level you have (or hit dice for creatures without class levels), and also an additional +2 on Fortitude saves.

Step 2: Size Bonuses and Penalties

Table: Size Bonuses and Penalties

Size	AC/Attack	CMB/CMD	Fly Skill	Stealth Skill
Fine	+8	-8	+8	+16
Diminutive	+4	-4	+6	+12
Tiny	+2	-2	+4	+8
Small	+1	-1	+2	+4
Medium	+0	+0	+0	+0
Large	-1	+1	-2	-4
Huge	-2	+2	-4	-8
Gargantuan	-4	+4	-6	-12
Colossal	-8	+8	-8	-16

You may change size when polymorphing, which can affect your AC, attack, CMB and CMD, plus your Fly and Stealth skills.

Apply these modifiers after making the adjustments due to changed ability scores.

Step 3: Equipment

If your new form is capable of using your gear, then it transforms along with you to accommodate the new shape of your body and continues to function as normal. For example, a Dwarf using *alter self* to impersonate an Elf can still use his axe.

If you're changing into a form that cannot use your gear, then it melds into your body. It won't be visible. Your armor and shield stop providing an AC bonus, and so do any magic items (like Bracers of Armor) that provide shield or armor bonuses to AC. Druids using Wild Shape can keep the AC bonus from armor or shield *if* it has the "Wild" enchantment. Magic effects that provide an AC bonus, like *mage armor* or *shield*, continue functioning as normal.

Other magical items keep working as normal *if* they provide a constant ongoing effect that you don't have to explicitly activate. For example, a Ring of Regeneration will work when you are running around as a boar; but a Wand of Cure Light Wounds is inaccessible and useless to you until you revert to your normal shape.

There may be some edge cases where it's unclear whether an item would continue working as normal. For example, if you use *monstrous physique II* to become a centaur, your sword will likely work as normal, but your boots may not. In such an instance, consult your GM for a ruling on what you get to keep and what you lose.

Step 4: Remove Native Abilities

You lose the base abilities of your original form. That includes:

- Your base land speed
- Any senses you may have (low light vision, darkvision, scent)
- Any abilities arising from your physical form (such as natural attacks)

For example, an elf who changes into a cat will lose the "Elven Immunities" ability, thereby becoming susceptible to magic sleep effects and losing the +2 on saves versus enchantment. However, the same elf would retain the "Weapon Familiarity" ability granting proficiency with bows, rapiers, and longswords. A cat is not physically capable of using any of those, of course, but the ability is retained because it results from training rather than being an inherent physical ability of the elf's body.

If you are unsure whether you lose a particular racial ability, consult with your GM.

You retain the benefit of any feats that you have, though they are not necessarily going to be useful in your new form. For example, Dodge continues to provide its +1 AC bonus regardless of your form, whereas Weapon Focus (Longbow) is useless to any creature which cannot hold a longbow.

Step 5: Add New Abilities

Your new form offers you a variety of abilities.

Attacks

First, you gain the natural attacks of your new form, and are considered proficient with them. For example, if you change into a wolf, you gain a bite attack and treat it as a weapon you're proficient with, governed by

your Strength (or Dexterity if you have Weapon Finesse) as normal.

Some natural attacks are considered secondary, and are made at a -5 penalty. For more information on this point, consult the [Natural Attacks](#) section of the Bestiary. The same section details the base damage for each natural attack, based on type of attack and creature size.

Movement

You gain the base land speed of your new form. For example, turning into a tiger grants you a land speed of 40 ft.

Other types of movement are a bit trickier. The spell which you used to transform lists a variety of movement types. If your new form has one of those, you gain it. However, the speed listed in the spell is a cap. For example, if you turn into a small air elemental using the spell *elemental body I*, you only get a 60 foot fly speed even though a real air elemental has a fly speed of 100.

By the same token, if your new form has one of the listed types of movement but it moves slower than the spell indicates, you get the slower speed. For example, *beast form II* allows you to have a Swim speed of up to 60 feet. If you use it to turn into a crocodile, you only get a swim speed of 30 feet, because that's how fast a normal crocodile moves when swimming.

Note that gaining a Fly speed entitles you to a bonus on Fly checks, based on how maneuverable you are: Clumsy -8, Poor -4, Average +0, Good +4, Perfect +8.

Other Abilities

The abilities that you get when polymorphing — such as various senses, movement speeds, and special attacks — are listed in the spell that you're using. You only receive an ability under two conditions:

1. The target creature must possess the ability natively.
2. The ability must be listed in the spell you are using.

For example, if you turn into a wolf using *beast form I*, you gain low-light vision, because wolves have that, and the spell says you get it. But you do not gain darkvision even though *beast form I* lists it, because wolves do not have darkvision. Other abilities follow the same logic.

The quality of the abilities you can gain improves as you use higher level spells. For example, *beast shape I* does not grant you the “pounce” ability, but *beast shape II* does. And *beast shape III* grants you both pounce and rake.

Final Thoughts

Polymorphing and wild shaping can be a powerful and useful skill in any game. But, as you can see, it can also become rather involved.

So if you are going to be using an alternate form on any kind of a regular basis, **make a separate character sheet for that form in advance**. Doing so will save you from bringing your gaming session screeching to a halt while you sort through the details of a new form.