



How to maintain a healthy Body Mass Index (BMI)

People come in all shapes and sizes. While it's good to embrace our differences, staying healthy is important for everyone. One key indicator of health is your body fat percentage.

The first step in managing your body fat is to get an accurate assessment of how much body fat you have. The best way to determine this is by measuring your Body Mass Index (BMI), which estimates your percentage of body fat based on your height and weight.

For adults, your BMI is calculated by dividing your weight by the square of your height. According to the US Preventive Services Task Force, by factoring in both your height and weight (rather than considering your weight alone), your BMI can determine if you are at risk of certain diseases.

What is a healthy BMI?

Adult Body Mass Index is a range of body fat percentages that are determined by your age and height. The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) notes that people with a BMI between 18.5 and 25 are typically considered healthy. Those with a BMI lower than 18.5 are considered underweight, and those with a BMI between 25 and 30 are considered overweight. People with a BMI of 30 or higher are considered obese and are at a high risk for disease.

While BMI measurements are standard for most people, there are exceptions. For example, athletes and people with a higher level of muscle mass may generate a BMI calculation that designates them as overweight or even obese despite their high level of fitness. It's important for athletes to talk to their doctor to ensure they're maintaining a healthy body fat balance.

What are the health consequences of a high BMI?

When it comes to the amount of body fat you carry, the stakes are high. Obesity and elevated levels of body fat carry a variety of health consequences and can affect your overall health and quality of life. They include:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Gallbladder disease
- Osteoarthritis
- Sleep apnea
- Chronic inflammation and pain
- Certain types of cancer
- Mental disorders such as anxiety and depression
- Increased risk of death

How to measure your BMI

During your annual physical, your doctor will typically measure your height and weight. Based on this information, they will chart your BMI. In between your doctor's visits, you can self-monitor your BMI by weighing yourself and using a [BMI calculator](#) for up-to-date measurements.

Measuring BMI for children and teens

Children and teen BMIs are measured using the same formula as adult BMIs, but with age and gender factored in. This is due to variances in BMI throughout children's development that may tip the scales. Talk to your child's pediatrician about their BMI as it changes so you know what to expect as they get older.

How to maintain a healthy BMI

Maintaining a healthy BMI takes some work - how much physical activity do you need? Check out this [resource](#) for guidelines. For starters, try working your way up to 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity per week. Staying hydrated and eating a balanced diet are equally important. If your BMI isn't where it should be, you may want to reduce your caloric intake and increase your exercise.

When to call a doctor

If your BMI score is outside of a healthy percentile, it's time to call a professional. Consult your primary care doctor for advice on ways you can achieve a healthy balance of body fat. You might want to see a dietician to help you achieve your health goals.