

BMI

What exactly is BMI (body mass index), and is it important for your health journey?

Does a low BMI mean you are healthy? Does a high BMI increase your risk of a heart attack? Does eating healthy along with exercise mean you'll have a low BMI? Are you healthy if your BMI is between 19 and 25? YES AND NO.

History of BMI

In the early 19th century, a Belgian mathematician (Adolphe Jacques Quetelet) produced a formula to give a quick and easy way to measure the degree of obesity in the general population to assist the government in allocating resources. The person who dreamed up the 200-year-old equation explicitly said that it could not and should not be used to indicate the level of fatness in an individual.

Physiologically wrong!

BMI makes no allowance for the relative proportions of bone, muscle and fat in the body. Bone is denser than muscle and twice as dense as fat, so a person with strong bones, good muscle tone and low fat will have a high BMI. Thus, athletes and fit, health-conscious movie stars who work out a lot tend to find themselves classified as overweight or even obese. It also does not consider your age, body type or ethnicity.

BMI Creates Averages

This doesn't apply to individuals. It suggests there are distinct categories of underweight, ideal, overweight, and obese, with sharp boundaries that hinge on a decimal place. Insurance companies sometimes charge higher premiums for people with a high BMI. Among such people are all those fit individuals with good bone and muscle and little fat, who will live long, healthy lives during which they will have to pay those greater premiums.

Calculating your BMI is simple

BMI (weight in pounds x 703)/

(height in inches x height in inches)

A BMI of 19-24.9 indicates normal weight

less than 19 is considered underweight

25-29.9 is considered overweight, and 30 or higher is

considered obese.

Beyond BMI

Measure your waist with a tape measure. Go around your waist by your belly button. Men should keep their waist size to no more than 40 inches. Women should stick to no more than 35 inches. The waist-to-height ratio is another tool. This compares your waist measurement to your height. The goal is for your waist circumference to be less than half your height. Skinfold thickness measurement, and ultrasound. Your doctor can help decide if these further tests may be needed.

Despite all the progress we have made in science since Quetelet's 19th-century index, we are still far from being able to measure our body's fat conveniently and accurately in a physician's office.

I'm not afraid of heights, I'm afraid of widths.



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Helen's love of fitness began at an early age. She practiced dance, gymnastics as well as track and field. She's an Exercise Physiologist with 35 over years' experience. She is also a certified personal trainer, corrective exercise specialist, nutrition consultant and Senior fitness specialist. Owner: Unique Health & Fitness

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