

About BMI: Fact Sheet

What is BMI? BMI, or body mass index, is a calculation that uses height and weight to estimate body fat. For years, pediatricians have used height and weight measurements to assess a child's physical growth. Now they have another tool: BMI. Using this tool, a pediatrician can determine how appropriate a child's weight is for her height and age. Starting when your child is 2 years old, your pediatrician will determine BMI at routine checkups and plot this measurement on a chart, just like the growth charts you may already be familiar with.

Because what is considered a normal BMI changes with age, your child's BMI must be plotted, rather than using a universal normal range for BMI as is done with adults. There are also separate charts for boys and girls to account for differences in growth rates and amounts of body fat as boys and girls mature. For children under 2 years, instead of BMI your pediatrician will be charting weight for length on a graph. Plotting the BMI is the first step in evaluating a child's healthy eating and activity patterns and behaviors, so your pediatrician will also be asking you about your family's nutrition and physical activity and working with you to make healthy lifestyle choices.

What is a BMI percentile?

After BMI is calculated for children and teens, the BMI number is plotted on the BMI-for-age growth charts (for either girls or boys) to obtain a percentile ranking. Percentiles are the most commonly used indicator to assess the size and growth patterns of individual children in the United States. The percentile indicates the relative position of the child's BMI number among children of the same sex and age. The growth charts show the weight status categories used with children and teens (underweight, healthy weight, overweight, and obese). BMI-for-age weight status categories and the corresponding percentiles are shown in the following table.

Weight Status Category	Percentile Range
Underweight	Less than the 5th percentile
Healthy weight	5th percentile to less than the 85th percentile
Overweight	85th to less than the 95th percentile
Obese	Equal to or greater than the 95th percentile

To learn more about BMI visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/>