



BMI Facts

The Facts About BMI (Body Mass Index)



What *is* BMI?

BMI stands for *Body Mass Index*. It's a simple number calculated using a child's height and weight. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends the use of BMI to screen for overweight and obesity in children and teens aged 2 - 19 years.

What does BMI *percentile* mean?

BMI percentiles show how a child's BMI compares to other kids of the same age and sex. Here's how it works:

- If a child's BMI is in the 85th percentile, it means their BMI is higher than 85% of kids their age.
- BMI categories are based on these percentiles—this helps doctors understand if a child is at a healthy weight, overweight, or at risk for obesity.

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

Important to remember:

BMI doesn't measure body fat directly. For example, athletes may have high BMI due to muscle, not fat. But overall, BMI is a helpful way to screen for potential health concerns.

Why Does BMI Matter? A high BMI can signal a greater risk for health issues, such as:

- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Type 2 diabetes

These problems can start during childhood or show up later as a person grows up. That's why it's important to stay on top of BMI and overall health.

What Can You Do About a High BMI?

Good news—there are steps you and your family can take!

Focus on healthy habits:



Eat more fruits, veggies, and whole grains



Cut back on sugary drinks and snacks



Get active every day—find something fun to move your body



What Does BMI Mean for Your Child?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a useful tool that helps doctors understand if a child's weight is in a healthy range for their age and height. While it doesn't tell the whole story, it can help identify potential health concerns early—and guide the conversation around nutrition, activity, and overall well-being.

Your doctor can help you create a plan that fits your family's lifestyle, with realistic goals and support every step of the way.

Small steps today can lead to healthy habits for life.

Schedule a checkup to talk with your pediatrician about your child's growth and what it means for their future health.

Source: Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

