



UNDERSTANDING BMI: A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

What is Body Mass Index (BMI)?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a tool that estimates body fat based on weight and height. Healthcare providers may use this tool to check for health risks related to weight.

But using BMI has its limits. It does not give a complete picture of a person's overall health.

What BMI does well

- A general picture: BMI gives a general idea of health risks related to weight. It can help a provider know if a person could be at risk for certain health issues.
- Population studies: Scientists often use BMI to study large groups of people. It helps them see similarities and differences between groups.
- Starting point: For some people, BMI can be a starting point to talk with providers about their well-being and ways to get healthy. It's like the first step in a big journey.

What BMI does not do well

- **Muscle vs. fat:** BMI doesn't tell the difference between muscle and fat. Someone with more muscle may have a high BMI but still be healthy.
- **Body shape:** BMI doesn't think about where a person's fat is or how their body is built. Two people with the same BMI can look very different and face different health risks.
- **Not for everyone:** BMI doesn't work well for everyone. It does not consider things like age, sex, bone density and ethnicity.

- **Feeling good matters:** Only focusing on BMI can lead to body dissatisfaction, disordered eating behaviors and low self-esteem. It's important for people to feel good about themselves, no matter what their BMI is.

How to think about health

1. **Focus on actions.** Instead of worrying about a number on the scale, focus on healthy habits that support overall well-being. These include:
 - Eating a balanced diet
 - Moving
 - Managing stress
 - Sleeping enough
 - Taking care of mental health
2. **Listen to the body.** We can pay attention to what our bodies tell us. This helps us know when we are hungry, full or satisfied. When we listen to our bodies, we can enjoy many different nutritious foods without guilt or limits.
3. **Embrace body positivity.** Our bodies do a lot for us, regardless of their size or shape. Treat them with kindness and respect. Stay close to people who are supportive and affirming.
4. **Seek professional guidance.** Work with a healthcare team that looks at all parts of health, including physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being.

BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR WORDS

Choose words that are respectful and inclusive of all body sizes and shapes. Use phrases like "a person with a higher weight or living in a larger body". Be kind to everyone, including yourself!