

Evaluating your body fat and weight-related health risks

To be at their best, adults need to avoid gaining weight, and many need to lose weight. Being overweight or obese increases your risk for high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, certain types of cancer, arthritis, and breathing problems. A healthy weight is key to a long, healthy life.

Calculating your Body Mass Index

Body fat, instead of weight, is a better predictor of health. The easiest way to determine whether you're too fat is to figure out your body mass index, or BMI. Your BMI is a better measure of fatness than just body weight and can help identify your risk of developing certain health problems, such as coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure.

Your BMI is calculated with this formula*:

Step 1: Multiply your weight in pounds by 0.45

For example, if you weigh 200 pounds: $200 \times 0.45 = 90$

Step 2: Multiply your height in inches by 0.025

For example, if you're 5'6" (66 inches): $66 \times 0.025 = 1.65$

Step 3: Square the answer from step 2

$(1.65 \times 1.65 = 2.72)$

Step 4: Divide the answer from step 1 by the answer from step 3.

This number is you BMI ($90/2.72 = 33$)

* Hensrud, D. D. "Mayo Clinic on Healthy Weight", Kensington Publishing, New York, 2000.

So what does the BMI number mean?

If your BMI is between 18.5 and 24.9, you're considered in a healthy weight range for your height. If your BMI is between 25 and 29.9, you're considered overweight. And, if the figure is 30 or greater, you're considered obese and should talk to your doctor about losing weight for your health.

Healthy Weight BMI from 18.5 up to 25 refers to a healthy weight.

Overweight BMI from 25 up to 30 refers to overweight.

Obese BMI 30 or higher refers to obesity. Obese persons are also overweight.

Not all adults who have a BMI in the range labeled "healthy" are at their most healthy weight. For example, some may have lots of fat and little muscle. A BMI above the healthy range is less healthy for most people; but it may be fine if you have lots of muscle and little fat. The further your BMI is above the healthy range, the higher your weight-related risk. If your BMI is above the healthy range, you may benefit from weight loss especially if you have other health risk factors.

BMI's slightly below the healthy range may still be healthy unless they result from illness. If your BMI is below the healthy range, you may have increased risk of menstrual irregularity, infertility, and osteoporosis. Unexplained weight loss may be an early clue to a health problem.

Waist Circumference

Your waist size is another measurement that is useful in determining weight-related health risks. It indicates where most of your fat is located.

Measure around your waist, just above your hip bones, while standing. Health risks increase as waist measurement increases, particularly if waist is greater than 35 inches for women or 40 inches for men. Excess abdominal fat may place you at greater risk of health problems, even if your BMI is about right

If you carry most of your fat around your waist or upper body, you may be referred to as apple-shaped. If you carry most of your fat around your hips and thighs or lower body, you may be referred to as pear-shaped. Generally, when it comes to your health, it's better to have the shape of a pear than the shape of an apple. If you have an apple shape — a potbelly or spare tire — you carry more fat in and around your abdominal organs. Fat in your abdomen increases your risk of many of the serious conditions associated with obesity. Women's waist measurement should fall below 35 inches. Men's should be less than 40 inches. If you have a large waist circumference, talk to your doctor about weight loss.

Conclusions

Keep track of your weight and your waist measurement, and take action if either of them increases. If your BMI is greater than 25, or even if it is in the "healthy" range, at least try to avoid further weight gain. If your waist measurement increases, you are probably gaining fat. If so, take steps to eat fewer calories and become more active.