

ARE YOU AT A HEALTHY BODY WEIGHT?

Did you know that there is no ideal weight for everyone of the same height? This is because people have different genetic make-ups that lead to a variety of shapes and sizes. The good news is that instead of one particular weight, there is actually a range of weights that are healthy for your height.

Your Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure of your weight and height to determine if your weight is healthy. Although the BMI should not be used as the only measurement of health risk or body composition, it can help set your weight loss goal. Other important factors to consider are a measure of body fat distribution (i.e. waist circumference measurement) and risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and high blood cholesterol levels.

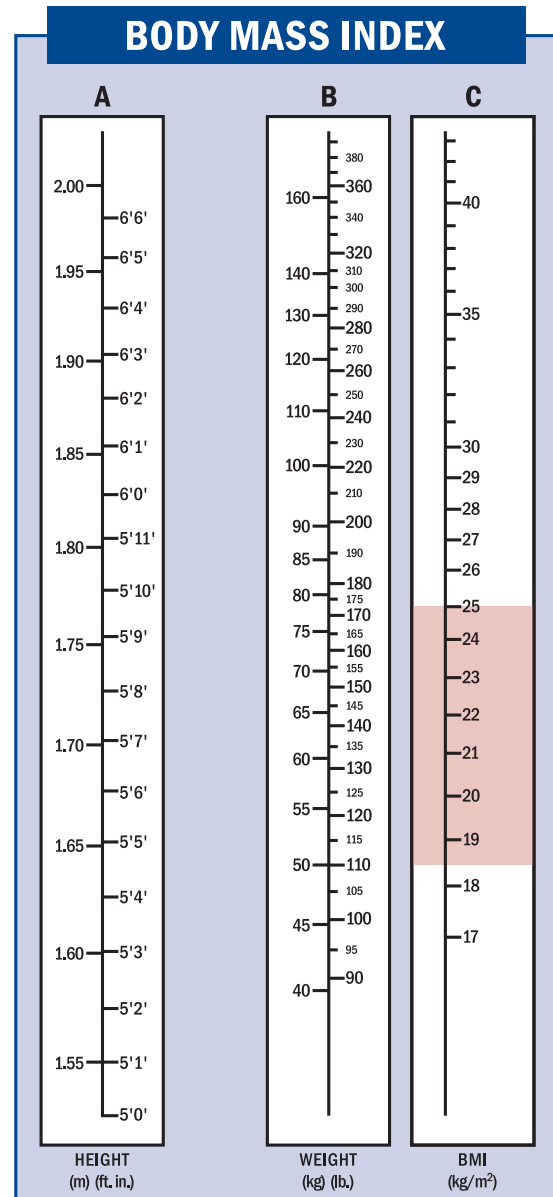
The BMI should only be used for adults aged 20 – 65 years. It should not be used for children, adolescents, pregnant or breastfeeding women, seniors, very muscular people or endurance athletes.

How to Find Your BMI

1. Mark an X at your height on line A.
2. Mark an X at your weight on line B.
3. Take a ruler and join the two X's.
4. To find your BMI, extend your line to line C.

What Does Your BMI Mean?¹

- **Less than 18.5** is considered “underweight” which can be a risk for developing anemia, depression and other health problems.
- **18.5-24.9** is considered “normal weight”. If you have a big frame, you will likely be at the high end of the healthy weight range. If you have a small frame, you will likely be at the lower end of the range.
- **25-29.9** is considered “overweight” and is a risk for developing health problems like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and cancer.
- **Greater than 30** is considered “obese” with greater health risks.
- **Greater than 40** is considered “extremely obese” and treatment options should be discussed with your doctor.



Waist Circumference (WC)^{1,2}

This measurement gives an indication of how fat is distributed in the body. It is also helpful in assessing your health risk, especially if you have a BMI of 18.5-34.9. To measure your waist circumference:

- Stand straight with your abdomen relaxed; feet should be together and arms hanging at the sides.
- Have someone place the flexible measuring tape around your waist at your belly button.
- Take a normal breath and record the waist circumference when you breathe out.
- For a more accurate reading, measure 3 times and use the “average” measurement.

If men have a WC greater than 40 inches (102 cm) and women greater than 35 inches (88 cm), there is a greater risk for chronic diseases like heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. These risks exist even if you have a BMI within a “healthy weight range.”

Note: The most accurate reading would be provided by a person qualified to take waist circumference measurements such as a physician or a Registered Dietitian. But, having someone you know take your measurement can give you a reasonable idea about your waist circumference.

The best way to achieve or maintain a healthy weight is through regular physical activity and eating a healthy diet.

Regular Physical Activity

For good health and to maintain a healthy body weight, Canadians of all ages should accumulate 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. But, if weight loss is your goal, you should increase activity to 60 minutes on at least 5 days of the week. You can accumulate “active minutes” throughout the day to reach your goal (e.g. in blocks of at least 10 minutes added up throughout the day).

“Moderate intensity” physical activity will mean different things to different people. Your breathing patterns will be a good indicator of how hard you’re working. You should be able to talk without too much difficulty. If you can’t talk, you’re working too hard. If you can sing, you may not be working hard enough!

The following are examples of “moderate intensity” physical activity:

- walking briskly, cycling or swimming
- household chores (e.g. general cleaning, painting, raking leaves, gardening)
- recreational activities like soccer, dancing or aquatic fitness classes

The benefits of “moderate intensity” physical activity also include:

- decreased stress
- increased energy levels
- better sleep patterns
- decreased risk of chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and colon cancer

Healthy Eating

Enjoying a variety of foods can be easy when you follow *Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. The Food Guide helps you choose the type and amount of foods to meet your energy and nutritional needs.

The amount of food you need depends on your age, body size, physical activity level, whether you are male or female and if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Therefore, the Food Guide has a range of servings for each food group. For adults, the Food Guide recommends:

Grain Products	5-12 servings/day
Vegetables & Fruit	5-10 servings/day
Milk Products	2-4 servings/day
Meat & Alternatives	2-3 servings/day

Active teens or young adults may choose the higher number of servings. Older men and women may choose the lower number of servings. The rest of us can probably choose servings somewhere in between.

If you are already at a healthy body weight, it is still important to participate in regular physical activity and eat nutritious foods. If you are working toward a healthy body weight, remember to think positively and make small gradual changes in your lifestyle.

Sources:

Health Canada. Canadian guidelines for body weight classification in adults. (2003). Retrieved March 2, 2005 from http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/weight_book_cp_e.html.

Chicago Dietetic Association, South Shore Suburban Dietetic Association and Dietitians of Canada. Manual of Clinical Dietetics, 6th edition. American Dietetic Association. Chicago, Illinois. 2000.