

What is a Healthy Weight?

You might have noticed at your last visit to the pediatrician that your doctor referred to your child's BMI score. In addition to height and weight, Body Mass Index or BMI is yet another tool used to determine growth and development in children. While you may have seen your child's height, weight and age plotted on a growth chart at each checkup, using the BMI score in regards to children is relatively new.

So what is BMI and how does it measure growth? BMI or Body Mass Index is a calculation that uses a child's height, weight, age, and gender to estimate how much body fat he or she has. This information is useful in determining if what your child weighs is appropriate for their height and age. Once this calculation is made using a mathematical formula, the physician can then identify whether that child is at risk of becoming overweight or obese as they get older. After the age of two, BMI should be measured over several visits and noted in your child's medical record. These BMI scores are recorded on a chart that measures percentiles. A child's BMI percentile shows how he or she compares to other kids of the same age and gender. For example, if a 4 year old boy has a Body Mass Index score in the 75th percentile, 75% of male 4 year olds have a lower BMI. Based on their BMI scores, children are put into 1 of 4 categories:

>95th percentile = overweight

85th -95th percentile = at risk for overweight

5th – 84th percentile = healthy weight

<5th percentile = underweight



Whatever category your child may fall in, it is important to look at your child's growth and BMI record over time instead of focusing on a single score. You should know that BMI is not a perfect measurement but one that will fluctuate as a child experiences periods of quick weight gain or loss, such as in puberty or times of illness. The purpose of this additional tool is to assess the risk for becoming overweight in order to treat the problem before it occurs. Because an overweight child is at an increased risk of developing health problems such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and heart disease, having this information ahead of time can be crucial. Helping children to achieve and maintain a healthy weight can give them a head start to a healthy adulthood.

Here are some tips to help children maintain a healthy weight:

- Encourage physical activity. Most kids should get at least 60 minutes of exercise every day.
- Make fruits and vegetables available. Keep fresh produce cut up and ready to eat in the refrigerator. Place a bowl of fresh fruit on the table well within reach.
- Remember that kids need kid-sized portions. Most adult portions are way too big for children.
- Limit sugary beverages and serve ice water, fat free or low-fat milk, and diluted 100% fruit juices instead.
- Turn off the television. Limit screen time and video game time in favor of physical activity.
- Set a good example by eating healthy and being physically active yourself.

For more information on Body Mass Index, please visit www.kidshealthy.org