

# Body Mass Index Basics — Information for Parents

- Body Mass Index (BMI) is a number calculated from person's height and weight. BMI provides a reliable indicator of body fatness for most children and teens.
- The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend the use of BMI to screen for weight risks both overweight and underweight in children ages 2 through 19.
- For children and teens, healthy BMI numbers are different for males and females of different ages and is often referred to as BMI-for-age.
- To see whether a child's growth is appropriate, doctors look at the BMI in comparison with those of other children who are growing at a healthy rate. The BMI values are most commonly expressed in percentiles, which indicate the relative position of the child's BMI number among children of the same sex and age.
- By putting your child's BMI on a chart, the doctor sees your child's BMI percentile, or rank compared with other children. The BMI number is plotted on the CDC BMI-for-age growth charts.
- Shown in the table below are the BMI-for-age weight status categories and the corresponding percentiles.

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

- Childhood overweight and obesity is now recognized as a major, independent risk factor for heart disease.
- Overweight children tend to have health problems more commonly found in adults like diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, asthma, sleep apnea and social discrimination.

**References** <http://www.altarum.org/research-initiatives-health-systems-health-care/improving-human-health-systems-mission-projects/BMI-FAQs>

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

