
Fitness Tips

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What does BMI (Body Mass Index) mean, exactly?

***Question:** I'm hearing a lot about BMI and I'm wondering what exactly that means?*

Answer: BMI, or Body Mass Index, is a calculation that takes into consideration both a person's body weight and height to determine whether they are underweight, overweight, or at a healthy weight. The only two measurements you need are your height and weight: divide your weight in pounds by your height in inches times your height in inches, then multiply that total by 703. Find your total in these categories: Below 18.5 = Underweight, 18.5 -24.9 = Normal, 25 - 29.9 = Overweight, and 30 & Above = Obese. So if you are 5'5" tall (which is 65") and weigh 120, divide 120 by 4225 (65 x 65) and then multiply that total (.028) by 703 to end up with 19.7, which would be "normal" on the BMI scale! To find an easy BMI calculator online, go to <http://www.consumer.gov/weightloss/bmi.htm>.

In a broad sense, the BMI can help you get a general idea of your risk for disease. It's important to note that although BMI is accurate most of the time, it may overestimate or underestimate body fat. The BMI doesn't distinguish between body fat and muscle mass, which weighs more than fat. Many professional athletes would be labeled "obese" because of their high BMI, when they actually have a low percentage of body fat. The BMI accuracy is also questionable in elderly adults, who have often lost muscle and bone mass -- even though their BMI might be within a normal range, they could still be overweight. Many health experts say that body fat percentage is a better indicator of weight status than BMI. Looking at the big picture, BMI should be just one of the tools used to measure whether you're at a healthy weight!

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