

NutritionMatters

Nutrition Services | Health Services Department

Body Weight and Health... What is the Link?

People come in a variety of body types, shapes and sizes. This is because we are all unique individuals with different genes and lifestyles. However, being overweight or obese, as well as underweight may put you at risk for certain health problems.



What health problems are related to body weight?

Some of the health problems related to being overweight or obese include:

- Type 2 diabetes
- High blood cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Certain cancers (e.g., breast, colon, prostate, kidney)
- Gall bladder disease
- Sleep problems
- Fertility problems

Health problems related to being underweight include:

- Osteoporosis
- Malnutrition
- Infertility
- A weakened immune system

Being underweight may also be connected to an eating disorder or another illness.

Is my body weight the only thing that affects my health?

Body weight is only one component in finding out if you are at risk for health problems. It is important to know that some of the above health problems may also be influenced by other “risk factors” such as:

- Age
- Smoking
- Poor eating habits
- Low level of physical activity
- Family history

It is important to consider **all** of these risk factors in addition to your body weight when determining your risk for health problems. The more risk factors you have, the greater is your risk for developing health problems.

How do I know if my health is at risk due to my body weight?

Health experts use two measures to find out if your body weight is putting you at risk. These are:

- Body Mass Index (BMI), and
- Waist size or waist circumference (WC)

BMI is a measure of your weight related to your height. Your BMI tells you whether your weight is “normal” or if you are at risk for health problems related to being underweight, overweight or obese.

How do I determine my BMI?

You can determine your BMI by using the attached BMI chart on page 4 or by calculating the following equation:

$$\text{BMI} = \text{weight in kilograms} / (\text{height in metres})^2$$

So what does my BMI tell me?

Classification	BMI category	Risk for health problems
Underweight	Less than 18.5	increased
Normal weight	18.5-24.9	least
Overweight	25.0-29.9	increased
Obese	30 or greater	high

Health Canada, 2003

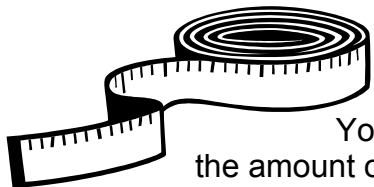
Can BMI be used for everyone?

BMI can not be used for people under age 18 or pregnant and breastfeeding women. As well, BMI is not always an accurate indicator of health risk for:

- People who are very muscular
- Adults who naturally have a very lean body build
- Young adults who have not reached full growth
- Adults over 65 years of age
- Certain ethnic and racial groups, such as people from China or South Asia

Take out your tape measure!

In addition to finding your BMI, you can measure your waist size or waist



circumference (WC) to determine your risk for health problems.

Your WC is a measure of the amount of fat around your waist

area. People who carry more of their weight around their waist are at greater risk for developing conditions such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease. If you are a man and your waist is more than **102 cm (40 inches)** or a woman and your waist is more than **88 cm (35 inches)**, then you're in the high-risk zone!

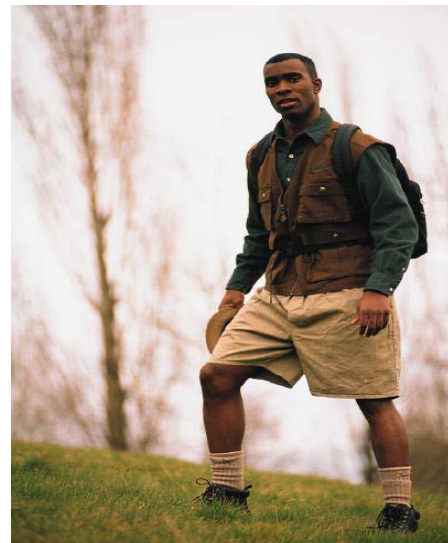
If your BMI is in the "normal" range, but your WC is too high, you are still considered to be at risk for the health problems related to being overweight or obese.

How do I achieve and maintain a normal body weight?

The best way to achieve or maintain a normal body weight is to be active, eat well and be yourself.

Be active!

To stay healthy or improve your health, follow **Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living*.



Every effort counts. Walk the dog, play with your kids, rake the leaves and take the stairs. The more active you are in everyday life, the healthier you'll be. Keep moving. Feel alive. Enjoy!

Start small. Increase your activity level by just 10 minutes a day, then slowly increase it again when the activity has become part of your regular routine. Aim for at least 30 minutes of activity each day, whether it's 30 minutes at one time or three 10-minute sessions throughout the day. Be active just for the fun of it. Feel your body respond.

Set realistic goals. Remember, you are aiming for better health. Set activity goals that you can reach and chances are better that you will continue to be active. Choose activities that energize you.

Eat well!

Enjoying a variety of foods can be easy when you follow **Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*. This guide helps you choose the kind and amount of foods to meet your energy and nutrient needs.

The amount of food you need each day depends on:

- your age
- your body size
- how active you are
- whether you are male or female
- if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, and
- whether you are maintaining or trying to lose weight

Variety adds enjoyment. Healthy eating includes a wide variety of foods – even decadent desserts, from time to time. Eat the foods you enjoy – balanced with healthy choices and size-wise portions.

Listen to your body cues. Are you really hungry? Has it been four hours since you last ate? Is your stomach grumbling? Listen to your body...you may need other nourishment such as sleep, fresh air, cool water or maybe just a change of pace. Trust your instincts.

The 20-minute message. It takes 20 minutes for your brain to register that your stomach is full. Slow down to savour the

flavour! Enjoy the colour, smell, taste and texture of each bite you take before going back for more...you may not need it. Listen to your body.

Be yourself!

Enjoy being unique. Like your fingerprint, your body is one of a kind – the result of genetics, lifestyle and experiences. Stop comparing yourself to others and focus on the best possible you. Adopt a healthy attitude for life.



Turn negatives into positives. Recognize how people or events trigger negative feelings about your body image. Develop coping strategies to deal with these situations. Don't let others control your happiness – only you have that power.

Accept yourself. Recognize that healthy bodies come in different shapes and sizes. Be proud of those unique qualities that set you apart from the rest. Love and appreciate yourself – body and mind.

Remember:

If you are already at a “normal” body weight, it is still important to be active and eat well. If you are working toward a “normal” body weight, remember to think positively and make small, gradual changes to your lifestyle.

**To obtain a copy of Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating and Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living, call Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653.*

BMI	Height (ft/in)																		
	Weight (lbs)	4'10"	4'11"	5'0"	5'1"	5'2"	5'3"	5'4"	5'5"	5'6"	5'7"	5'8"	5'9"	5'10"	5'11"	6'0"	6'1"	6'2"	6'3"
100	21	20	20	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	15	15	14	14	14	13	13	13	12
105	22	21	21	20	19	19	18	18	17	16	16	16	15	15	14	14	14	13	13
110	23	22	22	21	20	20	19	18	18	17	17	16	16	15	15	15	14	14	13
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295	62	60	58	56	54	52	51	49	48	46	45	44	42	41	40	39	38	37	36
300	63	61	59	57	55	53	52	50	49	47	46	44	43	42	41	40	39	38	37

Less than 18.5 = Under-weight: increased risk for health problems
18.5-24.9 = Normal-weight: low risk for health problems
25-29.9 = Overweight: increased risk for health problems
30 or greater = Obese: high risk for health problems



www.healthymeasures.ca

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