

Body mass index (BMI)

Varying factors

BMI is not an absolute measurement, merely a very useful guideline. You shouldn't draw any conclusions without understanding certain facts.

- BMI and associated targets can vary according to **ethnic group**. For instance, the BMI target of Asian people tends to be lower than that of North-American adults.
- **Women** have a lower tendency than men to be classified as "overweight" or "obese," in part due to their muscle and bone mass.
- **Athletes** or very active people can have an elevated BMI due to high muscle mass, without running any particular risk of developing health problems.
- Other factors should also be taken into consideration. For instance, some people are naturally very thin; others, like young adults, haven't finished growing yet.

Interpreting BMI

BMI, whether high or low, can indicate a risk or the presence of various health problems.

Elevated BMI

- diabetes
- heart problems
- hypertension
- illnesses of the gall bladder
- certain types of cancer

Low BMI

- osteoporosis
- malnutrition
- other food-related disorders

Preventative measures

The golden rules of managing your BMI are the same as those for certain diseases like hypertension and diabetes. The general idea is often to **eat well, exercise, stop smoking** and **consume alcohol with moderation**.

It's by putting these ideas into practice that we can reduce the risk of developing health problems and our goal of "normal weight" can be achieved.

It's never too late to adopt good lifestyle habits to reach a healthy weight!

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Weight and health

It is generally accepted that there is a connection between body weight and health. Many studies have shown that excess weight can cause health problems. It can also be risky to be underweight compared to what is generally considered normal weight.

That's why the Canadian Body Weight Classification System was established. The system uses the body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference (WC) to assess the risk of developing health problems associated with being overweight or underweight.

Definition

The Body Mass Index (BMI) is a **simple correlation between weight and height**. Following the results of international research, four BMI categories were approved by the World Health Organization. Once established, BMI lets us know if a person is more or less at risk of developing certain illnesses.

Calculate BMI and waist circumference

Formula – metric system

$$\text{IMC} = \frac{\text{weight (kg)}}{\text{height (m)} \times \text{height (m)}}$$

Example: A woman of 1.60 m that weighs 50 kg has a BMI of 19.5. According to the categories established by Health Canada, she is of "normal weight."

Formula – imperial system

$$\text{IMC} = \frac{\text{weight (lb)}}{\text{height (in)} \times \text{height (in)}} \times 703$$

Example: A man of 5'8" or 68 in. that weighs 195 lb has a BMI of 29.6. According to Health Canada's categories, this man is "overweight."

Use our interactive Body Mass Index Calculator at www.uniprix.com/health

Waist circumference gives us an idea of abdominal fat. It's an important thing to know, as people who have a lot of excess fat around the waist and in their upper body ("apple-shaped" people) are more at risk of developing some health problems than people who carry their fat on their hips and thighs ("pear-shaped" people).

Generally, a waist measurement of 40 in (102 cm) or greater for men and 35 in (88 cm) or greater for women is associated with an increased risk of developing health problems.

Is your weight healthy?

There are four BMI categories:

Classification	BMI category	Risk of developing health problems
Underweight	< 18.5	Increased
Normal weight	From 18.5 to 24.9	Slight
Overweight	From 25.0 to 29.9	Increased
Obese	> 30.0	Elevated

Source: Health Canada. *Guidelines for the classification of weight in adults*, 2003.

Is somebody that has "normal weight" therefore protected from all illnesses?

No! The BMI is **only one factor in evaluating risk**. Other factors need to be considered to evaluate health risks, including:

- age
- physical activity
- smoking
- alcohol consumption
- diet
- medical and family history

Note: The system only works with people 18–64 years old, and not with pregnant or nursing women.

If you have any questions, ask your pharmacist!

