

Table 1: Definitions of BMI Percentiles

IF YOUR CHILD'S BMI IS...	IT MEANS YOUR CHILD...	AND IS CONSIDERED...
< 5th Percentile	...weighs less than 95 of 100 children	Underweight
5th –84th Percentile	...weighs less than 84 of 100 children	Healthy weight
85th Percentile	...weighs more than 85 of 100 children	Overweight
>95th Percentile	...weighs more than 95 of 100 children	Obese

Source: Based on Age & Gender Specific Reference Population BMI Growth Charts from the U.S. Centers of Disease Control and Prevention

Why can't I just weigh my child on the bathroom scale?

The bathroom scale cannot determine your child's age, height or gender. BMI provides a more standard measure of body weight regardless of height. BMI also can help you monitor your child's weight patterns over time.

What should I do if I learn my child is overweight?

If your child is overweight or at risk for becoming overweight, your family's health care provider should initiate a plan to help your child achieve a healthy weight. This usually entails a more complete examination of your child as well as questions about the family's eating and physical activity habits.

Should my child go on a diet?

In most cases, no. Your child is still growing, and it is important that he or she gets the required nutrients from a healthy diet. Diets can increase weight problems over the long term and create unhealthy weight loss practices, unrealistic body images and damaged self-esteem.



For most overweight children, the recommended goal is not to lose weight but rather to stop or slow weight gain. As the child continues to grow, a healthy balance between height and weight is eventually achieved.² Many overweight children gained too much weight largely because of the unhealthy foods they were fed. Therefore, it is crucial that parents be part of the solution. A health care provider treating an overweight child

will usually work with the entire family by encouraging better eating habits as well as healthier levels of physical activity.

If your child is overweight and has one or more serious weight-related medical conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure or sleep apnea, your doctor may feel that weight loss is needed. In such cases, more structured weight management interventions may be recommended to help reduce his or her weight by about 1 pound per month until a healthy weight is achieved.

How can I speak with my child about his or her weight?

Speaking with your child is not always easy. You should remain positive and avoid negative messages that might be damaging to your child's well-being. Being labeled as overweight or obese can negatively impact your child's self-concept and result in disordered eating.

Whenever you speak with your child about his or her weight, the message should be realistic, nonjudgmental and actionable. Experts say that parents should focus conversations on healthy eating, active living and positive self-esteem rather than on achieving a specific body weight.

Reference

² Flynn MAT, McNeil DA, Maloff B, et al. Reducing obesity and related chronic disease risk in children and youth: a synthesis of evidence with 'best practice' recommendations. *Obesity Reviews*. 2006;7(1):7-66.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are serious, potentially life-threatening conditions characterized by self-starvation, excessive weight loss, binge eating and cycles of binge eating and self-starvation.

While eating disorders may begin with pre-occupations with food and weight, they are usually about much more than food. Eating

disorders often arise from a variety of physical, emotional, social and familial issues, all of which need to be addressed as part of a treatment plan. Parents and others caring for children and adolescents should be aware of the signs and symptoms of eating disorders and should intervene early when they appear.

