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 Centers for Disease Control
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UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S HEALTH REPORT CARD

Body Mass Index (BMI)

How Is BMI Used with Children & Teens?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a number calculated from a child's weight and height. BMI is a reliable indicator of body fatness for most children and teens. For children and teens, BMI is age- and sex-specific and is often referred to as BMI-for-age. Age and sex are considered for children and teens since the amount of body fat changes with age and the amount of body fat differs between girls and boys.

After BMI is calculated for children and teens, the BMI number is plotted on the CDC BMI-for-age growth charts. There are different charts for boys and girls. The charts give a percentile ranking based on the BMI number. The percentile is

an indicator used to assess the size and growth patterns of individual children in the United States. The percentile shows the relative position of the child's BMI number among children of the same sex and age. The growth charts also show the weight status categories used with children and teens (underweight, healthy weight, overweight and obese).

BMI is used as a screening tool to identify possible weight problems for children. For children, BMI is used to screen for obesity, overweight, healthy weight, or underweight.

However, BMI is not a diagnostic tool. For example, a child may have a high BMI for age and sex, but to determine if excess fat is a problem, a health care provider would need to perform further assessments. These assessments might include skinfold thickness measurements, evaluations of diet, physical activity, family history or other appropriate screenings.



How Can Two Children Have the Same BMI but Fall Into Different Weight Categories?

The interpretation of BMI-for-age varies by age and sex so if the children are not exactly the same age and sex, the BMI numbers have different meanings. Calculating BMI-for-age for children of different ages and sexes

may yield the same BMI number, but that number will fall at a different percentile for each child. This happens due to the normal BMI-related changes that take place as children age and as growth occurs and/or the normal BMI-related

differences between sexes.

If your child's BMI falls into the underweight, overweight or obese category, talk to your doctor to see if further screening is needed.

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