

# What You Need to Know About BMI & Waist Circumference

*At TotalWellness, we believe that everyone is healthy. That's right, everyone has existing healthy habits, whether getting eight hours of sleep, hanging out with friends or walking their dog.*

*We want you to figure out what healthy means to you and how you can build upon your healthy habits. So we created this series of I Am Healthy Guides to help you do just that. Because healthy is happy. It's more than just exercising and eating right. Healthy feels awesome.*

**Repeat After Us: I am healthy.**

## I AM

Two of the most powerful words; for what you put after them shapes your reality.

**Medical Disclaimer**

Please note that the material in this guide is provided by way of information. It is not a substitute, nor does it replace, medical or other professional advice, or treatment of health conditions.

## *Why does Body Mass Index (BMI) and waist circumference matter?*

When paired with your personal health history, your Body Mass Index (BMI) and waist circumference are useful ways to assess your weight and health risk for conditions associated with obesity. Being overweight or obese greatly raises your risk for a host of health problems. These same measurements can also help detect if you're underweight, which may be an indicator of an eating disorder.

## *How does BMI and waist circumference affect my body?*

Your weight is directly tied to your health. Being overweight or obese can significantly increase your risk of developing a wide range of health conditions, including the nation's leading causes of death—heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and certain cancers—as well as issues like depression and infertility. Just as important is where you carry your weight; if most of your fat is around your waist rather than at your hips, you're at a higher risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

## *What do my BMI and waist circumference numbers mean?*

BMI is a measure of body fat that is calculated based on your height and weight. The correlation between a person's BMI number and obesity is fairly strong; however the correlation varies by sex, race, and age.

Most experts break down BMI into the following ranges:

- Underweight: 18.4 and below
- Normal: 18.5 – 24.9
- Overweight: 25.0 – 29.9
- Obesity: 30.0 and above

Waist circumference provides information regarding body fat topography – where the body fat is stored. Carrying too much fat around the middle is associated with an increased risk of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, certain cancers and heart disease.

As for waist circumference, we consider men with a waist circumference of above 41 inches and women with a waist circumference of above 36 inches to be at **high risk**.

## What affects my weight?

Your weight can be determined by a huge variety of factors. If you are overweight or underweight, figuring out the source of that weight struggle is key in becoming healthier. BMI and waist circumference can be affected by:

- Lack of physical activity: A sedentary lifestyle contributes to the development of obesity.
- Poor diet: Bad nutritional choices are one of the primary causes of weight issues.
- Genes and family history: Your chances of being overweight are greater if one or both of your parents are overweight or obese.
- Environment: Our culture often reinforces convenience over wellness. Work schedules, oversized portions, lack of access to healthy foods and advertising can contribute to obesity.
- Health conditions: Some hormone problems may cause overweight and obesity, such as underactive thyroid (hypothyroidism), Cushing's syndrome, and polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).
- Emotional factors: Some people eat more when they're bored, angry, or stressed.
- Age: As you get older, you tend to lose muscle, especially if you're less active.
- Lack of sleep: Research shows that lack of sleep increases the risk of obesity.
- Medication: Some corticosteroids, antidepressants, and seizure medicines can cause weight gain.

## How can I treat a high BMI and/or waist circumference?

If you are overweight, obese or underweight, always discuss treatment options with your physician first to determine the best course of action. There are countless resources and ideas out there to lose weight, but all seem to agree on the following basic principles: exercise more and eat fewer calories. Here are a few of our favorite tips and reminders to keep you on track:

- You don't to eat less; just choose low-calorie foods that still fill you up!
- Plan your meals in advance and have healthy snack options on hand.
- Schedule your workouts and consider finding a fitness partner.
- Make your healthy choices a lifestyle and not a temporary solution.
- Keep a food diary.
- Move more at work. Get up from your desk, try a walking meeting, or just go outside for a bit.
- Watch portion sizes and stop eating when you're satisfied.

**You don't have to try a trendy diet to lose weight. Just remember these basics:**

- Calories matter
- Serving size matters
- Fats and cholesterol matter
- Fruits, vegetables and whole grains matter
- Exercise matters
- Sticking to it matters

## *What else do I need to know about BMI and waist circumference?*

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than one-third of Americans (34.9%) are obese. By contrast, 2% of the U.S. adult population is underweight, a less prevalent but equally as serious problem.

The most important thing you can do is to take a proactive stance in maintaining a healthy diet and active lifestyle. Talk with your physician or a nutritionist for recommendations and find a healthy lifestyle that works for you. Doing so will reduce your risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, gout, breathing problems and much more.

### **How accurate is BMI?**

BMI is the measurement of choice for most health professionals and serves as an easy screening, inexpensive screening tool. However, it should not be used to truly diagnose obesity or other health issues.

BMI is not accurate for everyone. It does not take into account a person's muscle or bone mass, or if a woman is pregnant. It is generally assumed that being "overweight" means you have too much body fat, but that is not always true. For example, BMI may overestimate body fat in athletes and others with muscular builds. They usually have little body fat, but their heavy dense bones and well-developed muscles may cause them to fall into the "overweight" category. On the other hand, BMI may underestimate body fat in the elderly or others who have lost muscle mass for some reason. Also, BMI does not consider the location of fat, which is an important health indicator.

If you are concerned about your BMI result, follow-up with a healthcare provider to determine whether or not you have increased health risks because of your weight and/or percentage of body fat. A healthcare provider can take a direct measurement of your body fat and can evaluate your diet, physical activity, family history, etc. Knowing your percentage of body fat will help prevent you from being misclassified based on weight and height.

## ***Questions about your BMI and waist circumference results?***

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