

Body Mass Index (BMI)

What Does It Mean to Have a High BMI?

Abstract: Research has found that as BMI increases, the risk for certain diseases increases as well. Learn what BMI is, how it is calculated, what is considered normal, and what it all means for you.

BMI stands for body mass index. It is a measurement of a person's weight relative to his or her height. It is an indicator, not a direct measurement, of a person's total body fat. In most cases BMI correlates with total body fat, meaning that as one's BMI score increases so does his or her total body fat. While BMI is an accurate assessment of total body fat in most people, there are a few exceptions. Very muscular people may fall into the "overweight" category when they are actually healthy and very fit. For example a body builder with a very low body fat percentage could have the same BMI score as someone who is considered overweight. On the other hand an elderly person may fall into the "normal" weight category when actually they have little muscle mass and a high percentage of body fat.

An individual's BMI may be calculated in a number of ways including the use of mathematical formulae, tables in which one can match height in inches to weight in pounds to estimate BMI, and convenient calculators available on internet sites such as those listed at the end of this article. A normal BMI score is one that falls between 18.5 and 24.9. A normal score indicates that a person is within the normal weight status for his or her height. A BMI chart is used to categorize a person as underweight, normal, overweight, or obese.

BMI	Weight Status
Below 18.5	Underweight
18.5 - 24.9	Normal
25.0 - 29.9	Overweight
30.0 & above	Obese

So what does it mean to have a high BMI (higher than 24.9)? As stated previously, BMI is an indicator of total body fat and is therefore an indicator of health risk. BMI is used by healthcare professionals to screen for overweight and obese individuals. This information can then be used by healthcare professionals to assess a patient's health risk. A high BMI is a risk factor for disease and even death. People with BMI scores indicating that they are overweight or obese have a greater chance of developing high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol or other lipid disorders, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers. They are also at an increased risk for premature death, cardiovascular disease, gallbladder disease, sleep apnea, and osteoarthritis. As a person's BMI score increases so does his or her health risk.

However, a person's BMI score is not the only tool used by healthcare professionals to assess health risk. They also consider waist circumference, blood pressure, cholesterol level, blood sugar level, family history of disease, physical activity, and cigarette smoking when assessing a patient's health risk. Talk to your doctor and have him or her evaluate your BMI, waist circumference, and other risk factors. Ask your doctor if you are at an increased risk for disease and if you should lose weight. Remember, even a small weight loss can help to lower your risk of developing certain diseases.

Interesting Statistics:

- 70% of diabetes risk in the U.S can be attributed to excess weight
- Obese individuals have a 50 to 100% increased risk of death from all causes compared with normal weight individuals

For more information, please consult the following websites:

<http://nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>

<http://www.halls.md/body-mass-index/bmi.htm>

<http://www.consumer.gov/weightloss/bmi.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/bmi-adult.htm>