Are You at a Healthy Weight?

Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight is good for your overall health.

Learn more about

1. If you are at a healthy weight?
2. How to reach or stay at a healthy weight.
3. Why weight matters?

How does a healthy weight help my heart?

Maintaining a healthy weight can help keep your cholesterol and blood pressure in healthy ranges. Unhealthy cholesterol and blood pressure levels can lead to heart attack or stroke.

Overweight and obesity, which means having excess body fat, can increase your low-density lipoprotein (LDL), sometimes called “bad” cholesterol, and lower your high-density lipoprotein (HDL), the “good” cholesterol. Overweight and obesity can also increase triglycerides, a type of fat.

When you’re at an ideal weight for you, you’re less likely to develop:

- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- High total and LDL (“bad”) cholesterol, and low levels of HDL (“good”) cholesterol
- Coronary heart disease
- Stroke

What is a healthy weight for me?

One measure of a healthy weight is your body mass index (BMI). It shows if your weight is in the healthy range for your height. To figure out your BMI, weigh yourself and then use the BMI chart on the last page or the NHLBI BMI calculator. Always talk to a healthcare provider about what your BMI means for your overall health.

Your BMI will fall into one of the following categories. For most adults, a healthy BMI is between 18.5 and 24.9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight Category</th>
<th>Body Mass Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underweight</td>
<td>Below 18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy weight</td>
<td>18.5 to 24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overweight</td>
<td>25 to 29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obese</td>
<td>30 or above</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Research shows that adults with overweight and obesity can lower their LDL, raise their HDL, and lower their blood pressure by losing about 3% to 5% of their weight.

Health professionals usually suggest losing 5% to 10% of your initial weight over about 6 months.
What can BMI tell me about my health?

Your BMI is just one piece of the puzzle. It’s based on height and weight but doesn’t take into account your muscle mass, bone density, or body composition. Even if two people have the same BMI, their amount of excess body fat may differ, which affects their risk for certain diseases.

Your healthcare provider will consider whether your BMI is too high or too low for you. These factors affect their decision:

- **BMI can’t tell you if your weight is from muscle or excess fat.** Muscular individuals, such as highly-trained athletes, may have a high BMI because of muscle, not fat.
- **Health risks associated with higher BMIs can vary in racial or ethnic groups.**
- **Genetic factors may affect your BMI because of their effect on muscle mass and where fat is located on your body.**
- As you get older, muscle mass is replaced by fat. **Older adults may have more body fat than younger adults at the same BMI.** It’s important for all adults to be physically active to maintain muscle mass across the lifespan.
- **Women generally have greater amounts of body fat than men at the same BMI.**

A BMI in the healthy range doesn’t guarantee you’re healthy overall. Other factors, such as your blood sugar (glucose) levels, lipids (total cholesterol and LDL and HDL cholesterol), and blood pressure affect your health, too.

What else affects my health?

Your BMI and weight make up one part of your health profile. The following can also affect your heart and overall health:

- Blood pressure
- Blood sugar
- Cholesterol levels
- Resting heart rate
- Lifestyle, including smoking habits, diet, physical activity, and stress levels, sleep duration and quality, and alcohol use

Learn how to take action to improve your health.

What does waist size say about my health?

Checking the size of your waist is another way to see if your weight increases your risk of health issues. If most of your fat is around your waist and you have a larger waist size, high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes. To measure your waist, put a measuring tape snugly around it, breathe out, and then record the number of inches.

**A healthy waist size is:**

- Less than 35 inches for women who aren’t pregnant
- Less than 40 inches for men
What can I do to manage my weight?

Healthy eating, physical activity, stress reduction, and quality sleep and can help you reach and maintain a healthy weight. Medications you take, health conditions you may have, and your environment can affect your weight. Your genes may also play a role. For example, if you have biological relatives with a history of overweight and obesity, you may be more prone to gain weight. But you can still prevent obesity or manage your weight with a healthy diet, physical activity, and medication (if needed).

Healthy eating

Eat heart-healthy foods

Following a healthy diet, such as the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) eating plan, can help you manage your weight and blood pressure. The DASH eating plan encourages eating whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, rather than refined carbohydrates such as sugar. Limit saturated fats found in fatty cuts of meat, full-fat dairy products, coconut oil, palm kernel oil, and palm oil. Eat nuts and fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, and use vegetable oils including olive oil. Talk to your doctor about other changes you can make.

Be physically active

Being physically active and eating fewer calories can help you lose weight and keep it off over time. People vary in how much physical activity they need to maintain a healthy weight. Talk to your healthcare provider about what’s right for you. If you’re not already active, start small and increase gradually. Adults need 150 minutes or more of moderate-intensity activity a week to be healthy, according to the current Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. You may need to do more than 300 minutes of moderate-intensity activity and some strength training exercises a week if you want to:

- Lose a substantial amount of weight (more than 5 percent of your body weight).
- Keep off a significant amount of the weight you’ve already lost.
- Increase your muscle strength and mass with strength training exercises.

Moving more helps you burn calories and improves blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and stamina. Moderate-intensity activity means that you’re a bit breathless and can feel your heart beating faster.

To boost your activity:

- Dance or walk for 15 minutes several times a day. Four times equals an hour of movement.
- Take an in-person or online fitness class. You can find many free classes online. Ask a friend to join you.
- Try out a childhood favorite: Jump rope, skip, do jumping jacks, ride a bike, roller skate, or play basketball.

Two or more days a week do strength-training activities, such as lifting weights or using a resistance band. Try to involve all your major muscle groups.
Manage stress

Lowering your stress can help you reach and stay at a healthy weight.

To de-stress:
- Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate.
- Practice relaxation techniques, such as progressive relaxation. Tense your muscles for a few seconds, then relax them. Start with your toes and move up. Do one muscle group at a time.
- Take breaks from listening to the news or other sources of stressful information.
- Take time to do an activity you enjoy.
- Talk about your feelings with a trusted friend, family member, counselor, doctor, or faith leader.
- Participate in a stress management program.

Get enough good quality sleep

Not getting enough sleep or having inconsistent sleep habits makes it harder to reach and stick to a healthy weight because it increases your hunger and appetite, especially for high-calorie, high-carb foods. Too little sleep also triggers stress hormones, which tell your body to hang on to fat. Lack of sleep can increase your risk of obesity and other chronic health problems, including heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke, and depression.

To help you get the recommended 7 to 9 hours of sleep:
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine.
- Avoid computers and your phone an hour before bedtime.
- Avoid alcohol or caffeinated beverages or large meals close to bedtime.
- Keep your bedroom dark and cool, if possible.
- Try to wake up and go to sleep at about the same time every day.

Track your progress

Write down the steps you’re taking to help you reach and maintain a healthy weight. You’ll see how small changes add up to big improvements. Share your progress with your healthcare provider.

Write in a journal or use an app to record:
- The number of servings of fruits and vegetables you eat.
- Time spent on physical activity.
- Hours of good-quality sleep you get each night.
- Your weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol numbers.
Questions to ask your healthcare provider about your weight

What’s right for you may differ from what your friends or family members are doing to stay healthy.

Ask your provider:

- What is a healthy weight for me?
- Is my current weight putting me at risk for other conditions?
- Do any of my medications or health conditions affect my weight?
- Do I have any limits on my exercise?
- Are there any weight loss groups or plans you suggest?
- How often should I follow up with you?
- Would any medications help with my weight management?

Join others for support

Losing weight and managing a healthy weight can be challenging. Having social support and personal networks can help you live a heart-healthy lifestyle. Ask a friend or family member to join you on your journey.

Learn more about weight management and ways to improve your heart health at www.hearttruth.gov.
**BMI Table**

To use the table, find your height in the first column on the left, labeled Height. Move across the row to your weight. The number at the top of the column directly above your weight is your BMI.

<table>
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<th>Overweight</th>
<th>Obese</th>
<th>Extreme Obesity</th>
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