

What is a healthy weight for you?

A common-sense approach to setting weight management goals

Weight and body image in America

Aiming for a healthy weight can be confusing in today's celebrity-driven culture. Although there has been some movement toward more realistic body images, most of the models that people see in the media are extremely thin, lean and athletic - digital manipulation of fashion photography also helps quite a bit!

Few average Americans have the genetics, time or money necessary for such "perfect" bodies. Unfortunately, many people damage their mental and physical health in vain attempts to be beautiful and acceptable. Dumb diets, dangerous weight loss products and disordered eating are all too common, especially among teens, women and overweight people who will do anything in a desperate effort to reach the unattainable.

Government weight guidelines

Government weight guidelines have shifted from the old height-weight tables to the concept of Body Mass Index (BMI). In 1998, an expert panel from the National Institutes of Health chose BMI as a reliable and inexpensive way to classify the health risk of being overweight or obese.

BMI was used to define a healthy weight in the December 2001 *Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*. A BMI table, complete description of BMI calculations, and the relationship of BMI to health can be found in the Surgeon General's healthy weight advice for consumers at:

- www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/calltoaction/fact_advice.htm

Looking beyond BMI for your healthy weight

Many health professionals are using a more holistic definition of healthy weight - one that focuses more on health than weight. Here are some thoughts from experts who think beyond BMI when looking at weight management. **A healthy weight is:**

- determined by your lifestyle, not by a number on the scale or BMI chart.
- a weight where you can have food be part of your life, but not all of your life.
- the weight that one's body settles into with a balanced lifestyle, healthful eating and regular physical activity.
- a weight that is attainable and maintainable within a reasonably stable range without having to resort to heroic efforts of restricting caloric intake or excessively exaggerating caloric expenditure.
- a weight range that a person settles into while respecting natural appetites for food, movement and rest; without using restrictive eating patterns, compulsive exercise, medications or supplements to manage their weight.

