

In This Issue

What Is BMI?

Why Are We So Concerned?

What Is a Growth Chart?

Understanding Percentiles

What Can Parents Do?

Web Sites



Body Mass Index (BMI)

What Is BMI?

Body mass index (BMI) is a useful tool to help parents track their children's weight. It is a measure of a person's weight in relation to their height. BMI is a way to see if a child or teen is underweight, at a healthy weight, overweight or obese.

Why Are We So Concerned?

- ◆ The percentage of children and teens who are overweight has more than doubled since the early 1970s.
- ◆ About 15 percent of children and teens are now obese.
- ◆ Approximately 26 percent of Arkansas' children two to five years and 30 percent of teens are overweight or obese.
- ◆ Being overweight or having a high level of body fat increases the chance of having diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure.
- ◆ This generation of obese children may have a lifespan 10 years shorter than that of their parents.

What Is a Growth Chart?

Because children's body fatness normally changes over the years and body fatness is different in boys and girls, BMI is specific for gender (sex) and age in children. This is why experts at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have developed BMI-for-age growth charts that are gender specific for children and teens 2-20 years old.

Each of the BMI-for-age gender specific charts contains a series of curved lines showing percentiles. Health care professionals mark the child's BMI on the chart each year to see if the child is growing normally. Percentiles are based on the percentage of children of the same age and gender whose weight for height falls into a certain range. Here are a couple of examples:

- ◆ If a child's BMI is in the 60th percentile, this means that compared to children of the same age and gender, 60 percent have a lower BMI.
- ◆ If a child's BMI is in the 95th percentile, 95 percent of children the same age and gender have a lower BMI.

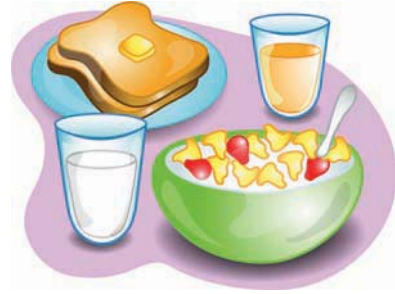
Health care professionals use these percentiles to see if a child is underweight, overweight, or obese.

Underweight	BMI-for-age is less than the 5th percentile
Overweight	BMI-for-age is 85th percentile to less than the 95th percentile
Obese	BMI-for-age equals or is greater than the 95th percentile

What Can Parents Do?

No matter what a child's BMI, here are some tips parents can use to help their children lead healthier lives.

- ◆ Start the day with a healthy breakfast like low-sugar cereal, low-fat milk and 100 percent fruit juice.
- ◆ Offer plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- ◆ Limit sweetened drinks like fruit punch and regular soft drinks.
- ◆ Limit fast foods.
- ◆ Eat meals together.
- ◆ Limit TV watching to 1-2 hours a day.
- ◆ Avoid large serving sizes.
- ◆ Be active as a family.
- ◆ Assign active chores.
- ◆ Be a role model.
- ◆ Show your children that you love them no matter what their size or shape.

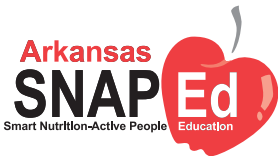


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If your child is overweight, being supportive is one of the most important things you can do. Overweight children need love, acceptance, and encouragement. Parents should not set children apart because of their weight. Instead, focus on involving the whole family in building eating and physical activity habits that can help all family members attain or maintain healthy weights.



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Want More Information?

If a child's BMI report looks as though the child might be underweight or overweight, parents should see their health care provider for further advice. Parents may want to plot their child's weight on a BMI-for-age growth chart and track it over the years. If you would like to find out more about growth charts, check out this web site:

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) web site www.cdc.gov

For more information on food, nutrition, or health, contact your county Extension office or visit www.uaex.uada.edu.