



Body Mass Index

The Body Mass Index (BMI) is a calculation that takes two simple measurements, height and weight, and provides a measure of surface area. The idea is that the greater the surface area, the more fat the typical person has. My experience is that most people don't like it because they feel that it doesn't apply to them—they have more muscle and larger frame size than the typical person. (See the next page to determine whether that's true for you.) I understand your doubts, but you can still use BMI to get an idea of what a healthy weight would be. A healthy BMI is 20 to 25, so your target weight should be in that range; 30 or more is trouble.

For example, if you're 5'10", no matter how large your bone structure or how much muscle you have, short of being a competitive body builder, if you weigh 165 to 180 pounds, you're going to be very close to the healthy BMI of 25. I think any healthcare professional would accept that as healthy, even if technically your BMI is 26. Use the BMI to give you a general target to shoot for. If you want to know your exact BMI, you would have to get a measure of body fat. That would involve more expense—it requires a healthcare professional to assess it.

If you enjoy math, you can calculate your BMI by dividing your weight in kilograms by your height in meters squared: $BMI = \text{Body Weight (kg)} / \text{Height (m)}^2$. To convert your weight to kilograms, divide by 2.2; to convert your height to meters, multiply your height in inches by 0.0254.

Or you can keep it simple and use this table. Find your height in the left column and your weight in the corresponding row. Move up to the top of that column to find your BMI.

		Body Mass Index															
		20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35
Height	Weight																
4'10"	96	100	105	110	115	119	124	129	134	138	143	148	153	158	162	167	
4'11"	99	104	109	114	119	124	128	133	138	143	148	153	158	163	168	173	
5'0"	102	107	112	118	123	128	133	138	143	148	153	159	164	168	174	179	
5'1"	106	111	116	122	127	132	137	143	148	153	158	164	169	174	180	185	
5'2"	109	115	120	126	131	136	142	147	153	158	164	170	174	180	186	191	
5'3"	113	118	124	130	135	141	146	152	158	163	169	175	180	186	192	198	
5'4"	116	122	128	134	140	145	151	157	163	169	174	180	186	192	198	204	
5'5"	120	126	132	138	144	150	156	162	168	174	180	186	192	198	204	210	
5'6"	124	130	136	142	148	155	161	167	173	179	186	192	198	204	210	216	
5'7"	127	134	140	146	153	159	166	172	178	185	191	198	204	210	216	223	
5'8"	131	138	144	151	158	164	171	177	184	190	197	204	210	216	223	230	
5'9"	135	142	149	155	162	169	176	182	189	196	203	209	216	223	230	236	
5'10"	139	146	153	160	167	174	181	188	195	202	207	215	223	230	237	243	
5'11"	143	150	157	165	172	179	186	193	200	208	215	222	230	238	244	250	
6'0"	147	154	162	169	177	184	191	199	206	213	221	228	236	243	250	258	
6'1"	151	159	166	174	182	189	197	204	212	219	227	235	242	250	258	265	
6'2"	155	163	171	179	186	194	202	210	218	225	233	241	249	257	264	272	
6'3"	160	168	176	184	192	200	208	216	224	232	240	249	255	264	272	280	
6'4"	164	172	180	189	197	205	213	221	230	238	246	254	262	270	278	287	
6'5"	168	176	186	194	202	210	219	227	236	244	253	261	270	278	286	295	
6'6"	173	181	190	198	207	216	224	233	242	250	260	268	276	286	294	302	
6'7"	177	186	195	204	213	222	230	239	248	257	266	275	283	292	301	310	
6'8"	182	191	200	209	218	227	236	245	254	264	273	282	291	300	309	318	

Do you have a large frame?

Many people excuse a little extra weight with the rationale, “I’m just big-boned.” Maybe, maybe not—let’s see if the science backs up your statement.

According to studies that examined correlations between anthropometric measurements and BMI, body frame can have an impact on your BMI target. The simplest measure of frame size is your wrist circumference, which works at almost any weight because very little weight is gained in that spot compared to areas like the waist or hips.

To determine your frame size, measure your wrist just below (towards the fingers) the bony part. Use the chart below to determine whether your frame size is large. If it is, shift your target weight one to two BMI units to the right on the chart; instead of 25, make the weight under 26 or 27 your goal, depending on the degree of difference. On the other hand, if your wrist is significantly smaller than the measurements below, you may be healthier at the target weight under 24 to 20 on the BMI chart.

For **women**, frame size is based on your height and wrist measurements:

- If you’re under 5’2”, you have a large frame if your wrist is greater than 5.75 inches
- If you’re 5’2” to 5’5”, you have a large frame if your wrist is greater than 6.25 inches
- If you’re over 5’5”, you have a large frame if your wrist is greater than 6.5 inches

For **men** over 5’5”, you have a large frame if your wrist is greater than 7.5 inches; there is no data available for men under that height.

Can your BMI be too low?

You may notice that the BMI chart begins with 20. A logical question would be: does that mean anything lower is bad?

Generally a BMI of 19.0 or greater is considered desirable; below 19.0, the amount of weight for height isn’t sufficient. Very low BMI may indicate a metabolic wasting disease such as cancer or an eating disorder such as anorexia. Low BMI may indicate a woman isn’t carrying enough body fat, and that can affect fertility.

If that’s where you’ve been all your life and you’re healthy, don’t be concerned. But if have reached a BMI that low by restricting your eating, time to check with a physician to see if everything is okay.