



# What's a healthy weight for kids?

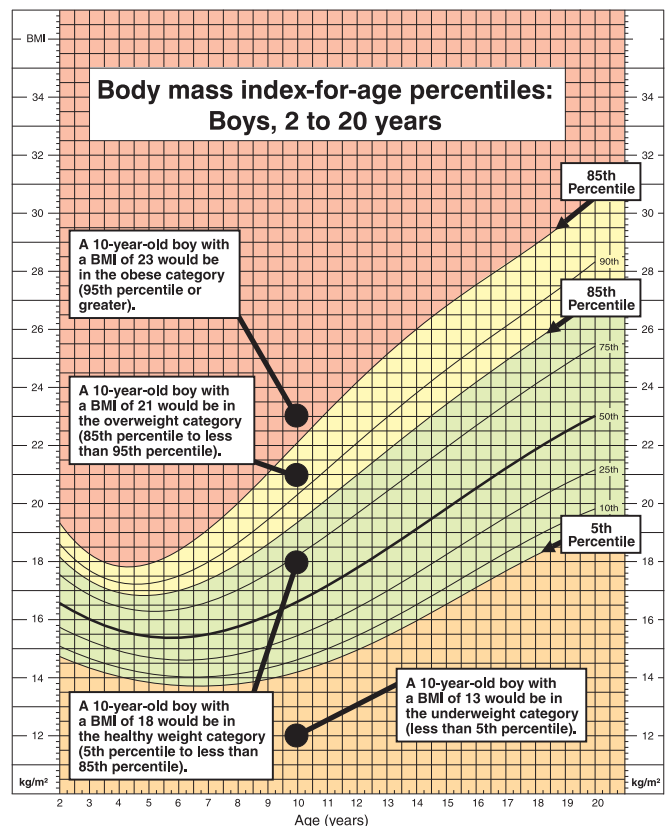
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**W**hen our child's health-care provider brings out the growth chart and plots our child's height and weight, some of us wait with bated breathe to see where our child falls on the chart. Is she growing at a steady rate? How is his weight compared with his height? Having children who are overweight these days is not uncommon. About 17 percent of U.S. children aged 2 to 19 are overweight.

Recently, health-care providers began graphing a new measure of growth called BMI for Age. BMI stands for body mass index, which is a comparison of weight to height. In adults, BMI is useful for identifying adults who are at risk for chronic diseases, such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease. BMI for adults is independent of sex and age.

In children, BMI is compared with other children based on their age and sex because 1) children still are growing and 2) growth patterns differ between girls and boys. Percentiles are the most commonly used indicator to assess the size and growth patterns of individual children in the United States. The growth charts show the weight status categories used with children and teens (underweight, healthy weight, overweight and obese).

(continued)



[www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/childrens\\_BMI/about\\_childrens\\_BMI.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/childrens_BMI/about_childrens_BMI.htm)

Ask your provider about the BMI for Age chart. Knowing how your child is doing weightwise is part of the full picture of your child's health. But the most important thing is to foster healthy behaviors in children so they can live a healthy life now that surely will carry them into adulthood. What are some strategies?

First and foremost, our children watch us closely, then they do what we do. So, whatever we expect from our children, we should expect from ourselves. Watch what we say to our children about their weight. Focus on the positive. Focus on the good activities and behaviors. Give lots of positive reinforcement through our words and actions. Diane Neumark-Sztainer (public health researcher) says, "Families can choose to talk less about weight ... with particular attention given to avoiding derogatory weight comments."

What can we do to make our environments conducive for children to choose healthy foods and be physically active? The first step is to reflect on our words and actions that are inhibiting healthy behaviors in our children. Then make a plan to incorporate one new healthy strategy at a time. See how things go!

**Health is a family endeavor,  
so we can try the following things:**

1. Limit sugar-sweetened beverages.
2. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables.
3. Watch television in a planned way (favorite shows only, then turn the TV off).
4. Eat breakfast.
5. Eat together whenever possible.
6. Watch those portion sizes — think of putting vegetables on half of your plate.
7. Be active as a family (walks, hikes, bike rides).
8. Foster interests in our children, involve them in activities (volunteering, sports, arts, 4-H — the opportunities are endless). Remember family time, though.



## Find your balance between food and physical activity

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