

## Growing Healthy Lives

# Understanding Pediatric Body Mass Index (BMI)

### Your Child's Body Mass Index is:

\_\_\_\_\_ At or below the 5th percentile

- A child whose BMI is at or below the 5th percentile is underweight.

\_\_\_\_\_ Between the 5th and 85th percentile

- A child whose BMI is between the 5th and 85th percentile is normal weight.

\_\_\_\_\_ Between the 85th and 95th percentile

- A child whose BMI is at the 85th percentile is at risk to become overweight at some point in his or her life.

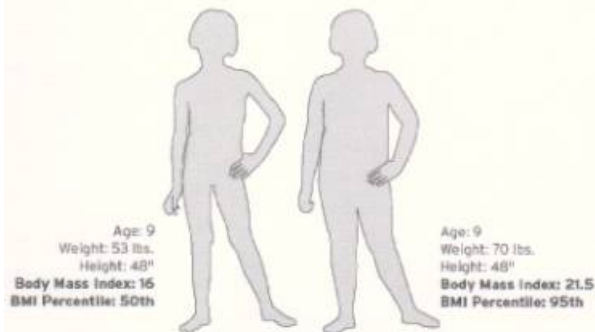
\_\_\_\_\_ At or above the 95th percentile

- A child whose BMI is at or above the 95th percentile is overweight.

### Body Mass Index: What does it mean?

- The Body Mass Index (BMI) formula helps us find out if a child's weight is right for his or her height.
- It is a good way to tell if a child will become overweight.
- Since children are still growing, their BMI number is put on a growth chart to see if their BMI percentile is in a healthy range.

The picture below shows how two children of the same age and gender with different weights compare in terms of BMI and BMI percentile.



### Why Does It Matter?

Your child's weight may affect his or her future in a number of ways:

- One in three children born in the year 2000 will develop type 2 diabetes during their life.
- Overweight children and teens are three times more likely to develop high blood pressure.
- Shallow breathing caused by too much belly fat can cause low oxygen levels, weak lungs and asthma.
- Overweight children have more joint problems in their knees, hips and elbows.
- An overweight six year old is 50 percent more likely to be obese as an adult; an overweight teen has a 70 percent chance of staying obese as an adult
- Being overweight by age 20 can cut 20 years off a person's life.

### When Should I Be Concerned?

A child who is 'At Risk of Overweight' or 'Overweight' should be evaluated by a healthcare provider.

A child's BMI percentile can vary a little from year to year. Any large change or jump in the BMI percentile could be unhealthy and should be checked by your provider.

BMI can be inaccurate if your child has a high level of lean body tissue or muscle. Your child's healthcare provider should be seen for a more thorough review that may include other health screenings and a review of family eating and physical activity habits.

If a child's risk for overweight is found early, your physician and you can work together to improve your child's health.



### **Good News**

Helping your child learn healthy habits may lead to a lifetime of good health. Other rewards include:

- More energy
- Better ability to focus on tasks
- More self-esteem and confidence
- Less chance for some diseases

### **What You Can Do**

All parents want their child to grow up healthy and happy. The healthy behaviors listed below may prevent or control many of the most troubling health problems in children:

- Eating healthy foods
- Being physically active
- Reducing television viewing and other recreational screen time

Parents can have a positive effect on children by considering the following recommendations:

- Promoting healthy values and attitudes
- Rewarding good behaviors
- Serving as good role models

### **Think about it...**

Ask yourself these questions:

- What things do you want most for your child now?
- Has your child's weight prevented these things from happening? Why?
- What can you do to help your child get these things?

### **When You're Ready To Make Changes**

- Make an appointment with:
    - ◆ Your child's health care provider
    - ◆ WellSpan Outpatient Nutrition Counseling Services  
York (717) 851-2942  
Gettysburg (717) 337-4264, ext 5
    - ◆ WellSpan Clinical Weight Loss Program for Children  
(717) 851-6207
  - Ask your health care provider for the booklet, "Growing Healthy Lives."
  - Ask your healthcare provider for an age specific "Physical Activity/Nutrition Tips for Parents" card.
  - Look for physical activity and/or healthy eating classes and activities. Contact community organizations such as hospitals, churches, recreation departments, YMCA, YWCA or JCC.
  - For more information, visit the following websites:
    - [www.bam.gov](http://www.bam.gov)
    - [www.dolesuperkids.com](http://www.dolesuperkids.com)
    - [www.keystoneactivezone.org](http://www.keystoneactivezone.org)
    - [www.kidnetic.com](http://www.kidnetic.com)
    - [www.learn-tobe-healthy.org](http://www.learn-tobe-healthy.org)
    - [www.smallstep.gov](http://www.smallstep.gov)
    - [www.smart-mouth.org](http://www.smart-mouth.org)
    - [www.verbnow.com](http://www.verbnow.com)
    - [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)
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