

Are you a healthy weight?

It's hard to open a magazine or newspaper these days without being bombarded with the latest diets – or celebrities who have gained or lost weight. Most of the women in celebrity magazines look decidedly underweight to the naked eye, so how can you tell whether your own weight is healthy, or whether a few more visits to the gym are called for?

Body Mass Index

The established method of determining whether you are a healthy weight is by calculating your Body Mass Index, or BMI. This is done by working out your height in metres and multiplying the figure by itself, (squaring it) then measuring your weight in kilograms and dividing it by your height squared. If that sounds too complicated for you, you can check whether your weight is in the healthy range on our [BMI calculator](#) which does all of the maths for you. If the result comes in between 18.5 and 25, congratulations, you are a healthy weight. If you are less than 18.5, you are considered underweight, and if you notch up 25 – 29 you are overweight. Anything over 30 puts you firmly into the obese category. If your BMI is over 40, you're classed as morbidly obese – but it's unlikely that you would need a BMI table to tell you that this isn't good for your health.

BMI as an indicator of health has been criticised by experts because it doesn't take into account the composition of the body, merely its weight. A muscular athlete could theoretically be classed as overweight by standard BMI tables because muscle weighs more than fat.

Weight Hip Ratio

Another method to help you decide whether you are a healthy weight (or size) is the Waist Hip Ratio, or WHR. A study in *The Lancet* in 2005¹ showed that the WHR was a more reliable indicator to whether someone was likely to develop heart disease, due to the pattern in which excess fat was distributed. Fat in the abdominal area – central obesity - has long been thought to be more harmful than excess fat on hips and thighs.

The WHR is worked out by measuring your hips and thighs at their widest point, and dividing the measurement of your waist by that of your hips. If you don't have a calculator handy, simply use our [WHR calculator](#). For women, the ideal ratio should

be less than 0.85. The higher the ratio (over 0.85) the greater your risk of heart disease is likely to be.

Waist Circumference

Your actual waist measurement is also a good indicator of your health and whether you should think about losing weight. Recent research² came to the conclusion that women with a waist measurement of more than 39 inches (99 cm) had double the risk of premature death compared to those with waists less than 25.5 inches (64.7 cm), regardless of their BMI.

Summary

- A healthy BMI is between 18.5 and 25
- A healthy WHR for women is 0.85 and above
- A healthy waist circumference is less than 39 inches (99cm)

References

1. Yusuf S, Hawken S, Ounpuu S, et al. Obesity and the risk of myocardial infarction in 27 000 participants from 52 countries: a case-control study. *The Lancet* 2005;366:1640-49
2. Pischon T, Boeing H, Hoffman K, et al. General and Abdominal Adiposity and Risk of Death in Europe. *NEJM* 2008;359:2105-2120.

A wide range of women's health resources are available at www.healthywomen.org.uk

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