

Measuring Body Mass Index and Weight-for-Length

How is Body Mass Index used with children and teens?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a number calculated from a child's height and weight (age 2 and older). BMI is an inexpensive and easy-to-perform method of screening to identify possible weight problems. For children and teens, BMI is age and gender specific and is often referred to as BMI-for-age.

The CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend the use of BMI-for-age to screen for overweight and obesity in children beginning at 2 years of age. BMI is not a diagnostic tool. For example, a child may have a high BMI for age and gender, but to determine if excess fat is a problem, the health care team would need to perform further assessments. These assessments might include evaluations of diet, physical activity, family history, skin fold thickness, and other appropriate health screenings.

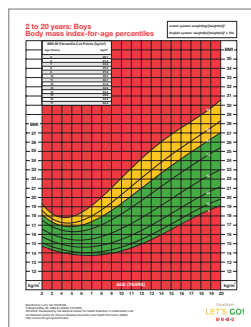
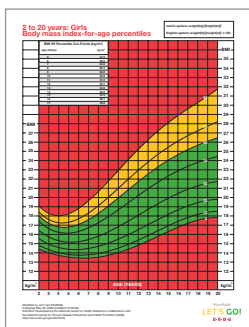
What is a BMI percentile?

After BMI is calculated for children and teens, the BMI number is plotted on the CDC BMI-for-age growth charts (for either girls or boys) to obtain a percentile ranking.

Weight Status Category	Percentile Range
Underweight	< 5th percentile
Healthy Weight	5th - < 85th percentile
Overweight	85th - < 95th percentile
Obese	≥ 95th percentile

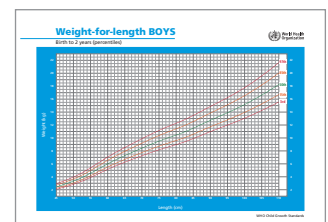
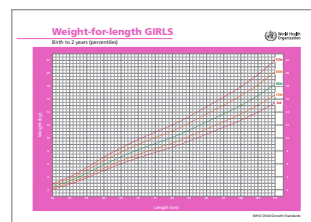
What about growth charts?

The growth chart is used to track BMI over time which provides clinical information for assessment, education, and intervention.



How do you measure children from birth to age 2?

For children birth to age 2, weight-for-length is used. Weight-for-length percentile charts allow clinicians to determine the trend of weight gain as compared to length gain over time (the measurement cannot stand on its own). Any abnormal patterns can help clinicians identify those children who need early intervention. Many older children and adolescents with BMI >95th percentile have been overweight since infancy, so early identification in the first 2 years can have large preventive effects.



Source: cdc.gov