

Children's Section: How do you know if a child is overweight/obese? Does it really matter?

The term 'obesity' simply means that a person's excess body fat has increased to such an extent that health may be negatively affected.

In order to find out whether your child is overweight or obese you need to take some measurements.

Taking an accurate weight

- Ideally use digital scales for accuracy
- Remove shoes and outer clothing
- Check that scales are on level floor and not on a soft carpet
- Child stands on centre of scales, keeping still, facing forwards
- Record measurement



Taking an accurate height

- Take child's shoes off
- Child stands straight against backboard of stadiometer
- Child places heels against heel plate, big toes touching
- Check that corner of eye is level (straight line) with hole in ear
- Ask the child to breathe normally and remain still
- Place head-plate on top of child's head
- Record measurement on measurement sheet

Calculating BMI (body mass index)

BMI is useful for comparing a person's weight to their height and will determine the degree of overweight or obesity.

Calculation: $BMI = (\text{weight in kg}) / (\text{height in meters})^2$

In adults :

BMI 20-24.9 =

healthy weight BMI

25-29.9 =

Overweight BMI 30+

=

Obese

In children under 18 years of age

- Cut-off points differ according to age and gender
- Plot the BMI onto BMI growth charts for children
- Check children's classification:
 - Healthy weight (< 91st BMI centile)
 - Overweight (91st - 98th BMI centile)
 - Obese (> 98th BMI centile)

**> 98th BMI percentile =
obese**

**91st – 98th BMI percentile =
overweight**

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The benefits of taking waist circumference measurements:

Waist circumference measurements provide us with information about the distribution of body fat and are a measure of risk for conditions such as coronary heart disease. It is well known now that people who carry their excess fat centrally (within the abdominal cavity) are more likely to suffer the consequences of being overweight.

By recording waist measurements in children they can be used as a motivating factor. Whilst we encourage children to maintain their weight but continue to grow taller a reduction in waist circumference is reassurance that the hard work is worthwhile.

Taking an accurate waist circumference measurement

- Child to stand facing you
- Ask the child to pull their own t-shirt up - avoid measuring waist with clothes
- Find the narrowest girth of the waist (about 2cm above the belly button)
- Ensure tape is level & not twisted behind the child's back
- Measure waist circumference with the tape horizontal

Plot waist circumference on the gender specific charts

Cut-off points differ according to age & gender **But...**

- There is no consensus on how to define obesity in children based on waist circumference
- For clinical use: <91st centile = healthy; 91-98th – overweight and >98th centile = obese

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Does it matter if children are overweight or obese? ... YES it does. The diagram below shows the medical problems associated with obesity.

Batch J.A. & Baur L.A., 2005

Where do I access help and support available?

Fit4it Juniors is a community programme for children aged 7-12 years old who are concerned about their weight. The programme is a 10 week programme and focuses on teaching both parents and children about healthy eating, active living and ways to change their behaviour. Each session lasts 1½ hours.

For more information about Fit4it Juniors or to sign up for the course contact Community Sports Foundation on 01603 761122, visit www.communitysportsfoundation.org.uk or email info@communitysportsfoundation.org.uk

Fit4it Seniors aims to help teenagers aged 12-16 years old with eating for health, encouraging them to try out new activities and improve their self-confidence.

For more information about Fit4it Seniors or to sign up for the course contact Community Sports Foundation on 01603 761122, visit www.communitysportsfoundation.org.uk or email info@communitysportsfoundation.org.uk

If you are concerned about your child's weight why not enrol them on to a HENRY (Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young). HENRY aims to help your child stay a healthy weight.