

What is Body Mass Index (BMI)?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is:

- *A calculation based on height, weight, age and gender.* Children's body fat content changes as they grow. Also, girls and boys differ in their body fat content as they mature. This is why BMI for children, also referred to as BMI-for-age, is gender and age specific.
- *A screening tool.* An elevated BMI does not necessarily mean a child is obese. For example, a stocky, muscular child can have an elevated BMI but a physician is the best judge of accuracy for body weight and health.
- *Recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.* In a 2003 policy statement, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends every child every year have their BMI assessed.
- *Informative.* BMI raises awareness among parents about health risks associated with obesity and overweight. Obese children now have diseases such as Type 2 Diabetes that used to only occur in adults. Overweight kids tend to become overweight adults, continuing to put them at greater risk for heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke.
- *A guide to help parents tell if their children are at risk of becoming overweight or underweight.* Many parents are not aware of their children's BMI and do not routinely discuss weight issues with their pediatrician or other healthcare provider.
- *Supported by scientific evidence that parents will use BMI information to modify their children's nutritional and physical activities.* According to a study by the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, parents of overweight children in Cambridge, Massachusetts who received health and fitness reports planned to change their child's diet and physical activity levels.