

Healthy body weight

Whilst Body Mass Index (BMI) gives a general indication of whether you are a healthy weight for your height, it is not suitable for everyone. For example, because muscle weighs more than fat, if you're an athlete or are very muscular, this can push you into a higher BMI category, even if you have a healthy level of body fat. Similarly as you get older, BMI may underestimate your risk of being overweight, because a greater proportion of your body weight will be fat rather than muscle.

What is perhaps more worthwhile is keeping an eye on your body shape to get a clearer picture of your overall health and risk of future health problems. Measuring your waist circumference can provide valuable information about where you are storing body fat and can be a more accurate picture of your health than simply stepping onto the bathroom scales or measuring your BMI.

Research has shown that people who carry extra fat around their waist (apple shaped or central obesity) are more at risk of obesity related health problems, such as high cholesterol levels, raised blood pressure, heart disease and stroke, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers, than those who carry it on their bottom, hips and thighs (pear shaped). Someone with an apple shape may face greater health risks than someone who has a pear shape, even if they are both overweight.

Find a tape measure. . .

And check the size of your waist in centimetres. A waist circumference greater than 80cm (32in) for women and 94cm (37in) for men indicates an increased risk, while a measurement of more than 89cm (35in) for women and 102cm (40in) for men indicates an even greater risk.