

BMI & Its Limits

Body & health

What BMI measures, what it cannot, and what to use alongside it.

Body Mass Index is weight in kilograms divided by height in metres squared. It is cheap, fast and useful across populations — and crude for any one person.

FORMULA

$\text{kg} \div \text{m}^2$

HEALTHY

18.5–24.9

WAIST

< half height

- Categories: under 18.5 low, 18.5–24.9 healthy, 25–29.9 overweight, 30+ obese.
- It cannot distinguish muscle from fat.
- It ignores where fat is carried, which matters more.
- Thresholds differ for some ethnic groups.
- It is unsuitable for children, athletes and pregnancy.
- Waist circumference adds information BMI lacks.

LOOK FOR IT

A muscular athlete can be classed obese by BMI with very low body fat.

Educational reference. Waist-to-height under 0.5 is a useful companion measure; a clinician can interpret both.