

# What is “BMI,” “BMI percentile” and why is it important?

First, let’s explain BMI – “**Body Mass Index**”.

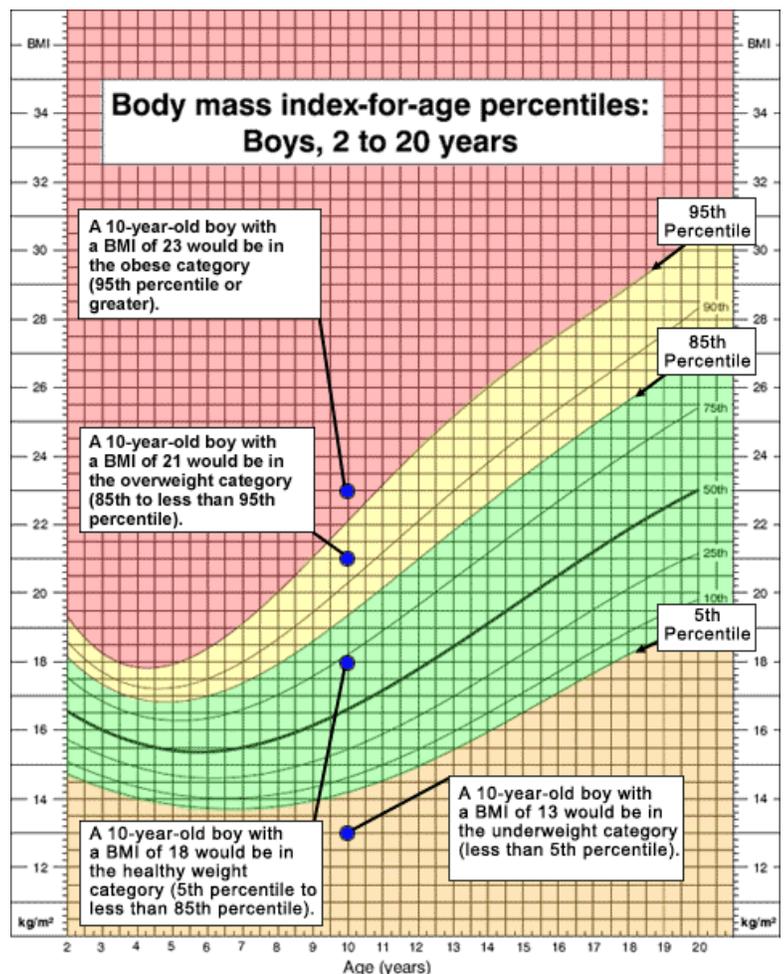
Body Mass Index is simply a number that gives us an idea of how much body fat you have. To get a person’s body mass index, you need to know their height and weight. BMI lets us see who may be at risk of having health problems due to their weight.

BMI is only a screening tool. It is not a perfect measure. For example, very muscular athletes may have a *high* BMI simply because they have more lean muscle mass than “fat” mass. It works the opposite way too. Just because a person’s BMI falls in the normal range *doesn’t* mean he or she doesn’t have excess body fat. This is another reason why it’s important to discuss your child’s medical history with the health care provider.

- The **BMI number is just part of the story**. The BMI number is plotted on a chart that looks at a child’s age and gender and gives us a number as a percent. This percent number for BMI tells us which group your child falls into:
  - underweight
  - healthy weight
  - overweight
  - obese

Take a look at this BMI percentile chart for boys. It shows how different BMI numbers for a 10 year old puts him in a different group.

The Higher the BMI number, the higher the BMI percentile. The lower the BMI number, the lower the percentile.



<b>Weight Status Category</b>	<b>Percentile Range</b>
<b>Underweight</b>	<b>Less than the 5th percentile</b>
<b>Healthy weight</b>	<b>5th percentile to less than the 85th percentile</b>
<b>Overweight</b>	<b>85th to less than the 95th percentile</b>
<b>Obese</b>	<b>Equal to or greater than the 95th percentile</b>

## So why does this matter?

A large amount of research has been done on childhood obesity. Research has shown that about 16.9% of children and teens aged 2-19 years are obese. It shows that a BMI greater than the 85th percentile increases a child's risk for medical problems (like diabetes and heart disease) due to their weight. This can impact your child's overall health and well-being now and in the future.

