The right weight for my height? [1]

Alice,

A friend and I were discussing this. We both try to stay healthy by eating well (high fiber, low fat, lots of veggies, fruit, etc.) and living an active enough lifestyle (hiking, rock climbing, biking, etc.) that we stay in shape. The question we have, then, is what the current "rules" are for appropriate weight/height ratios? Or are such measurements now thrown out in favor of body fat percentage measurements? She's 5'1" and I'm 6'1" and we're curious what the medical rule of thumb would be for how much each of us "should" weigh...mostly because we're wondering if it takes into account things like muscle mass. What would the current medical/health industry recommend each of us weigh? Are these numbers accepted or are they seen as not as important as they might have been 20 years ago. If you have actual numbers, we'd be curious to see that too. Thanks! I have a dinner riding on this!

? Curious

Answer

Dear Curious,

If you're trying to find your "ideal" weight, you may not want to bet your bottom dollar on a height-weight chart, or any one indicator of fitness for that matter. Body size is actually a pretty hefty topic that deserves a closer look. However, no matter where the scale points, maintaining a healthy diet and regular exercise are two signs that you're on the right track to fitness and overall good health.

One popular way to compare height and weight is the body mass index or BMI. For a full description, read About BMI for Adults [2] on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website. Basically, the BMI uses a math equation to create a ratio of your weight to height, similar to the older height-weight charts. Lower scores indicate you're on the lean side, while higher scores mean you may be too heavy for your stature. If you're looking for a clear-cut boundary between a "healthy" and "unhealthy" weight, your BMI can provide a helpful guide. However, BMI calculations can hide important differences in body composition. For example, BMI scores don't account for the fact a given volume of muscle weighs more than the same volume of fat. Likewise, the BMI says nothing about the distribution of fat throughout your body.

For another useful way to assess body size, break out a measuring tape. No matter what you weigh, waist size is another indicator of health. As it turns out, all fat is not created equal.
Packing extra pounds around the belly carries more health risks than flabby arms. According to experts at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the chances of developing heart disease and type 2 diabetes shoot up when your waist exceeds 35 inches for women or 40 inches for men.

Measurements aside, there's also a lot to be said for good eating and exercise habits. Another way to define "healthy" weight is by whatever size your body settles at naturally when you follow a healthy diet and exercise moderately. People come in many shapes and sizes so your ideal weight may not conform to the sleek physique pictured in magazines even if you're eating well and getting plenty of physical activity.

You might decide to employ the help of a registered dietitian, who can assess your eating patterns, activity levels, and body size to help you determine a weight that works for you. Here are some other helpful resources:

Healthy Weight? Research and tips from the Harvard School of Public Health

MyPlate? Personalized eating plans, calorie assessments, and other nutrition tools provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Weight and body size are key health indicators, but banking on numbers alone may not give you a complete picture of your overall fitness. Hopefully this information helps to settle the score!

Alice!
Category: Nutrition & Physical Activity
Miscellaneous

Related questions

Body fat? Genetic? Ideal caloric intake? Is it better to be fit and fat, or unfit and thin? What does body fat percentage mean? I want more curves What is the relationship between body composition and caloric need?

Resources

Medical Services (Morningside)
Columbia Health Nutrition Services (Morningside)
get balanced! Guide for Healthier Eating (Morningside)
Medical Services (CUMC)
Student Health Service Nutrition Services (CUMC)
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