

Classification of Body Mass Index (BMI)

The recommended classifications for BMI adopted by the National Institute of Health (NIH) and World Health Organization (WHO) and endorsed by most expert groups are:

- Underweight — BMI <18.5 kg/m²
- Normal weight — BMI ≥18.5 to 24.9 kg/m²
- Overweight — BMI ≥25.0 to 29.9 kg/m²
- Class I obesity — BMI of 30.0 to 34.9 kg/m²
- Class II obesity — BMI of 35.0 to 39.9 kg/m²
- Class III obesity — BMI ≥40 kg/m². This type of obesity is also referred to as severe, extreme, or morbid obesity.

The definition of overweight and obesity varies by race. The WHO and NIH Guidelines are currently applied to whites, Hispanics and blacks. For Asians, overweight is a BMI between 23 and 29.9 kg/m² and obesity a BMI >30 kg/m².

One should be aware that BMI may overestimate the degree of obesity in individuals who are overweight but very muscular (for example, professional athletes or bodybuilders).

The relationship between BMI and risk allows identification of several levels of risk. These arbitrary cutoffs are derived from data collected on whites. They have been widely adopted, because ethnic-based cutoffs are currently unavailable.