



Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Body image, self-esteem and health

We rarely see an overweight actor cast as an action hero or femme fatale in any Hollywood blockbuster. We only see physically “perfect” bodies – often further enhanced by makeup, lighting, and computer generated imagery. And when that “perfect” movie star gains even a small amount of weight, he or she may be mercilessly bullied in the media; they are hounded and hurt because they look, well, like us!



This societal obsession with what is a narrow definition of physical perfection can take its toll on our self-esteem and mental health. If our body type, weight or appearance does not conform to this rigid standard, social prejudices can make us unhappy with ourselves or even depressed. In fact, only **four percent of women**

around the world describe themselves as beautiful.

Youth are especially vulnerable to unrealistic body types displayed in magazines, websites, music videos, movies and TV shows. Eating disorders continue to plague girls (and a rising numbers of boys), and more young men are resorting to steroids to achieve the six-pack abs and impressive biceps of their celebrity heroes.

It’s time to hit the reset button and focus on our health, not the scales, and not what the fashion and entertainment pages tell us. And that begins with an understanding of what a healthy weight is.

Normal is normal

In reality, many celebrities and models are not a healthy weight. They can be dangerously underweight, putting their physical and emotional health at risk trying to maintain super-lean bodies through starvation diets, extreme exercising, as well as smoking and substance abuse to decrease their appetite. Whether too thin or too heavy – both pose health risks.

While an extra few pounds is **no cause for concern**, carrying more weight does increase our risks of developing certain health conditions, including:

- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- heart disease and stroke
- osteoarthritis
- gallbladder disease and gallstones
- gout
- breathing problems such as sleep apnea (when a person stops breathing for a short time during sleep) and asthma
- certain cancers

Our mental health may also suffer. Being overweight can cause depression and damage our self-esteem. Hence the more weight we carry, the greater the risks to our physical and emotional health.

Those of us who feel we are too heavy can take solace in the fact that we’re not alone. In fact, **one in four Canadians are considered overweight**. But when are we considered overweight? How do we know

if those few extra pounds we're carrying are nothing to worry about or if they pose health risks? Most doctors and nutritionists use the BMI – Body Mass Index – to determine if someone's weight is within a healthy range.

How to calculate Body Mass Index (BMI)

Body Mass Index is obtained from a calculation using your height and weight. The formula is $BMI = \frac{kg}{m^2}$ where kg is your weight in kilograms and m^2 is your height in metres squared. There are also plenty of BMI calculators available online, including on the [Canadian Diabetes Association site](#).

Health Risk Classification According to Body Mass Index (BMI)		
Classification	BMI Category (kg/m²)	Risk of developing health problems
Underweight	less than 18.5	Increased
Normal Weight	18.5 - 24.9	Least
Overweight	25.0 - 29.9	Increased
Obese class I	30.0 - 34.9	High
Obese class II	35.0 - 39.9	Very high
Obese class III	≥ 40.0	Extremely high

BMI is not for everyone

BMI is not used for body builders, many athletes, pregnant women, the elderly or young children. This is because BMI doesn't take into account the bodily components that make up weight. Those with more muscle mass, for example, will have a higher BMI but are not necessarily at increased risk. Those with a lower muscle mass, such as children or the elderly, may have a [lower BMI](#). Therefore, while BMI is a great tool for the average person, it should be used with discretion and in consultation with a physician.

The first step

While it may be impossible – or even desirable - to look like a Hollywood celebrity, we can accept our body type and concentrate on being as healthy as possible. If you or someone you care about has a BMI over 30, lifestyle changes may be in order– and they don't have to be major ones. Avoiding processed or fast foods is a good start. Try limiting sugary and fatty foods, drinking more water, reducing your food portions and being more active – even a short walk to the end of your street helps! In time, you will likely notice some significant health gains.

For more information on healthy living, contact your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP). You have access to a wide range of services and professionals, including Nutrition Support by Registered Dietitians and dedicated Health and Fitness Coaching.

please refer to your benefit material for more information. For immediate assistance, call 1.844.880.9137.