

Frequent comments and questions

about the National Child measurement
Programme (NCMP)





Parents tips for healthy kids

Regular meal times are really important for kids

As well as portion sizes that match a kid's age.

Two snacks max each day

This is a great guide for kids, one snack in the morning and one in the afternoon visit [Change4Life](#) website for ideas.

2 hours for screen time

Keeping time spent in front of TVs, computers and video games under 2 hours helps boost activity levels. How about making a house rule so kids can follow your good example?

Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are beautiful places

Maybe take time to be active by discovering where you live.

I don't understand how you've worked out my child's weight category. Can you explain?

We work out a child's weight category using Body Mass Index (BMI) centiles, which are different to adult BMI.

We start by working out your child's BMI using their height and weight (weight in KG/height in m²). We then plot this on a centile chart which compares your child to other children of the same age and gender. These charts look very similar to the height and weight centile charts your child may have been plotted on in their child health record (red book) when they were a baby. We have to use centiles in children as what is a healthy BMI changes as they grow and is different for boys and girls. We therefore have to take into account a child's age and sex when we assess their BMI.

The cut-offs for the weight categories in centiles are:

- Underweight is 2nd and below
- Healthy weight is between 2nd & 91st
- Overweight is over 91st
- Very Overweight is 98th and over

These cut-offs are recommended by the Department of Health as they have a good level of accuracy, that is they wrongly classify few children as overweight who are actually a healthy weight and few children who are actually overweight as a healthy weight.



Why do you use BMI for Children?

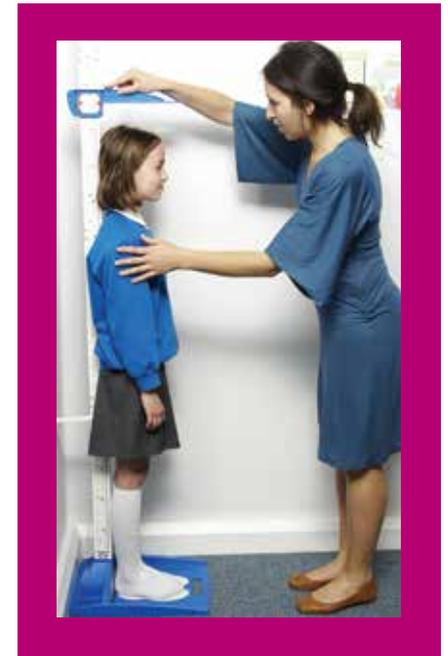
Using BMI centiles to assess weight in children is an accurate and reliable method to use when measuring of children.

We use the BMI centile for children because it provides a good indicator for levels of body fat. Having a BMI that is either too low or too high is associated with an increased risk of ill health.

Research shows that even doctors and nurses can't assess children's weight just by looking at them. Using a BMI centile is the best way to help understand how your child is growing.

The BMI centile takes into account a child's height, weight, age and sex. Using this method is accurate to identify overweight in children and has widespread international support and nationally, organisations such as NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) recommend the method used by the NCMP to identify overweight in children.

Studies are going on all the time to find new methods with better accuracy, but as yet using BMI in children remains the best available method.



You've told me my child is overweight/very overweight and I disagree with you

As a parent/carer, your opinion about your child is important.

As a parent/carer, your opinion about your child is important. You know your child well and know how healthy their lifestyle is. Your child's NCMP result is intended to add to your impression about your child's weight and lifestyle, not override it. If you disagree with the result, please read the information below and consider whether these factors might be relevant to you.

Research studies show that it can be difficult for parents to tell just by looking that their child is overweight. A child may not look particularly heavy to be overweight and because more children are becoming heavier at a younger age, we've become used to seeing bigger children. This is also true for the adult population: what we think of as 'normal' is changing.

There has also been a lot of media attention relating to obesity but this has tended to focus on more extreme case and this can affect the way we view the more minor, 'everyday' weight issues that we and our children are facing.

This is why an objective measurement like the BMI centile can be helpful.

Receiving your child's NCMP result can be a useful prompt to review your child's eating and physical activity habits to make sure you are on the right track. There are 5 key ways you can help your child to maintain a healthy weight. These are:

- Being a good role model
- Encouraging 60 minutes of physical activity a day
- Keeping to child size portions
- Providing healthy meals, drinks and snacks
- Encouraging less screen time and enough sleep

If you would like more detail on these, check out the information given on the NHS Choices page www.nhs.uk/ncmp3. If there are one or two areas where you feel you could make small changes, it is worth doing so, and then using the BMI tool at www.nhs.uk/bmi in a few months time to reassess your child's weight status to see if it has moved towards the healthy range.

Finally, it might be helpful for a health professional to assess your child face to face. Your school nurse or GP can provide a more in depth assessment and advise accordingly. If you feel this would be helpful, get in touch with your local school nurse team or GP surgery to make an appointment. Your child's school can provide contact details for your school nurse or go to www.schoolnurseteamcornwall.org and follow the links.



My child is just tall and has a chunky build. I think he/she is just 'in proportion', not overweight.

We used to think that tall children who were 'in proportion' for height and weight on the centile charts were healthy.

However the way we think about this has changed as we have come to rely on BMI centiles as an indicator of weight status.

In fact, where a child is *both* tall and heavy, that the cause for tallness is likely to be that they are consuming too many calories, whereas a child who is short and heavy is much more likely to have an underlying medical cause for their excess weight.

So, if your child's BMI centile suggests they are overweight, this is a better indicator than comparing their height and weight with each other.

Your health professional can advise you about your child's weight status if you feel you would like it re-assessed.

I think my child is heavy because it 'runs in our family' or it's his/her 'genes'. Aren't genes a cause of overweight in children?

There are some conditions where genes are a direct cause of obesity but these are very rare.

It is also possible to inherit a tendency to gain weight or tendency to find losing weight more difficult. Scientific studies have shown, however, that having these genes isn't the thing which determines whether a person will be overweight or not. People with a genetically inherited tendency to gain weight will only be overweight if they consume too many calories. So even with genes that make it more likely you or your child will be overweight, a healthy lifestyle can still prevent this. In the vast majority of situations, being overweight is

simply down to, over a period of time, consuming more energy than we are burning, or eating too much and moving about too little. And of course it is possible to inherit a healthy or unhealthy lifestyle in terms of our eating and physical activity habits. So, 'being heavy' can run in families, but this is most likely to be due to a combination of inheriting a tendency to gain weight and inheriting less healthy lifestyle habits. This is why one of the top tips for helping your child to maintain a healthy weight is to be a good role model yourself.



By weighing and measuring children and raising the issue of being overweight, aren't you at risk of causing eating disorders in children?

We are very aware of the sensitivities around weighing and measuring children in schools and the potential risks of focussing on weight as an issue.

For this reason, we make every effort to ensure the NCMP process is carried out sensitively. This includes things like carrying out the measurements in a private area, making every effort to avoid the child becoming aware of their measurements and not sharing the result with anyone but the parent/carer and relevant health professionals. Our approach is to respect the privacy, dignity and cultural needs of children at all times. Parents are offered the option to opt their child out of the measurements and no child is ever coerced into taking part if they do not wish to. We also ask schools to let the school nursing teams know if there are children who might be particularly sensitive about being measured so that the nurse can respond professionally and sensitively to this. There is, however, no evidence that carrying out the NCMP has resulted in a rise in eating disorders in children and research has shown that children respond sensibly and positively to being measured if the

process is carried out sensitively. On the other hand, the risks associated with the rise in childhood obesity are very real. Currently, in Cornwall, one in four children in Reception and one in three in Year 6 is overweight or obese. Childhood obesity has very well documented risks for the current and future health of children, their quality of life, self-esteem, educational and life chances. Given the balance of potential risks and benefits, we feel that continuing to offer weighing and measuring in schools, letting parents/carers know their child's result (offering support where required) and use of the information to plan support and services for families is the right course of action.

I feel judged or that you are criticising my parenting by telling me that my child is overweight or very overweight.

This is a very common feeling expressed by parents/carers receiving an NCMP letter indicating their child is overweight.

This result does not mean you are a bad parent or that your parenting is at fault and it is certainly not our intention to imply this. In fact, it is well accepted by specialists working in obesity that our current society actually makes it very difficult for people to maintain healthy weights. Larger portion sizes, freely available fast foods and sugary drinks, safety concerns around children playing outside and walking to school and more time spent in front of TV and computer screens are just some of the factors that can affect all our children. If children being overweight was purely down to parenting, this would imply that 1 in 3 Year 6 parents were bad parents, and we don't believe this! We think childhood obesity is everyone's responsibility and we all have a role to play in creating a society where healthier choices become the easier choices for families. We think NCMP is an important opportunity to share your child's result with you and offer you help and support should you require it. We also use the information to tackle some of the things that affect all children, like creating 'healthy schools' (www.cornwallhealthyschools.org) and making sure schools have a healthy approach to food (www.foodforlife.org.uk)



Should I talk to my child about their NCMP result? I'm worried about making them sensitive about their weight, hurting their feelings or making food a 'big issue'.

We don't think NCMP results should automatically be shared with children, which is why we send the letter direct to the parent or carer, rather than via the child in 'satchel post'.

Whether you share your child's NCMP result with them is ultimately your decision. You know your child best. It is understandable that you might feel anxious about talking to your child about their weight, as this can be a sensitive issue. A child's age, their ability to understand the discussion and their involvement in decisions about what they eat and how they spend their time are important factors to consider when deciding whether to have a discussion with them. For example, with young children it is probably better to make small changes to their diet and activity without having a direct discussion about weight, although you might talk generally to them about staying healthy. As children get older, you will probably want to involve them more in discussions about why you are choosing healthier foods and encouraging them to be active. Older children will understand the connection between their lifestyle and their weight and may well benefit from more direct discussion and involvement in how to manage it.

Like all sensitive issues, there are also more and less helpful ways of talking to your child about weight. The easiest way to turn something into a 'big issue' is to have a 'big talk' about it. Instead, you could take the chance to talk a little bit about it when opportunities arise. And it is very important not to be judgemental and to show your child that you don't blame them and are very willing to help. Most of all it is important to be open to having the conversation with your child, as avoiding it can give your child the message that being overweight is something that can't or shouldn't be talked about. Research shows that children as young as 7 can be unhappy about their weight and may try to lose weight without asking for help. These children are also more at risk of developing eating disorders than children who can talk openly about their weight to their parents and feel supported by them. Being open, non-judgemental and supportive of your child are therefore very important.

You've told me my child is overweight/very overweight. Does this mean they need to go on a diet?

No. Our advice is not to put your child on a weight loss diet.

We recommend trying to maintain a child's weight as they grow taller, so that their BMI moves into the healthy range. You can achieve this by making small lifestyle changes such as those suggested on the NHS Choices page www.nhs.uk/ncmp3. Alternatively, you might like some support with this. If so, call PHIL (the local Promoting Health Information Line) on **01209 313419**. An advisor there will be able to provide you with personalised advice for your family, tell you about the range of free healthy weight programmes running locally and refer you to other support and services, as appropriate. PHIL will work with the whole family so positive changes can be made together. There is also a range of local support available through Cornwall Healthy Weight. Check out their website at www.cornwallhealthyweight.org.uk.





Weight Concern provide some excellent, more in depth advice about talking to your child about their weight. You can find this on their website at www.weightconcern.org.uk

Change 4 Life top tips for top kids

1. Kids are designed to be energetic. It's really healthy if children get to be very active for at least one hour a day

2. Kids can add up these activity minutes in lots of different ways. Simply playing outside is a really good way of being active.

3. Encourage thirsty kids to drink water - it's better for health and can save you money! Sugary drinks provide no nutrition other than added sugar and calories which can contribute to unhealthy weights and tooth decay.

4. So eat well, move more and live longer!

If you would like this information
in another format or language
please contact:

Cornwall Council, County Hall
Treyew Road, Truro TR1 3AY

Telephone: 0300 1234100

Email: enquiries@cornwall.gov.uk

www.cornwall.gov.uk

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