

# Frequent comments and questions about the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP)

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

We work out BMI using a child's height and weight (weight in KG/height in M<sup>2</sup>). This is then plotted on a centile chart which compares your child to other children of the same age and gender. These charts are 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.

In fully grown adults, we can say that a person is overweight if they have a BMI of 25 and above. For children, we use centiles as BMI will change as a child grows and is different for boys and girls. Therefore, a child's age, height, weight and gender is used to assess their BMI.

The cut-offs for the weight categories are:

Underweight	Heathy Weight	Overweight	Very Overweight
<2 <sup>nd</sup> centile	2 <sup>nd</sup> - <91 <sup>st</sup> centile	≥91 <sup>st</sup> centile	≥98 <sup>th</sup> centile

These cut-offs are recommended by the Department of Health as they have a good level of accuracy. In other words, very few children are wrongly classified as overweight.

Some children will just fall into the overweight or very overweight category. In these cases, parents may find it helpful to measure the child again in a few months' time to see how their BMI centile is changing e.g. whether they are maintaining the same centile, moving into the healthy range, or moving up the centiles. You can do this by visiting [www.nhs.uk/BMI](http://www.nhs.uk/BMI)

***I've heard using BMI to assess weight is not very accurate. Why do you use it?***

Both International and National bodies such as World Health Organisation (WHO) and National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommend the use of BMI centiles as a tool to assess weight in children. BMI is used in adults, but BMI centiles are used for children. This takes into account a child's height and weight measurements, as well as their age and sex to determine whether a child is a healthy weight for their height, age and sex. 'Gold Standard' methods for assessing weight include MRI scanning and underwater weighing. As we measure over 6,000 children in South Gloucestershire, using such methods would not be practical or affordable.

***You've told me my child is overweight/very overweight and I don't agree with you. What should I do?***

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 overweight. What we 'see' as a healthy weight is changing because increasingly more children and adults are overweight.

There are some limitations to using BMI to assess weight in children, so in a few cases our method might wrongly classify your child as being overweight or very overweight when they are not.

But in the vast majority of cases the measurement is likely to be correct. We also know that BMI can be less accurate in certain groups of children, such as those who are particularly muscular for their age and certain ethnic groups, so it may be that this applies to your child.

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. See the Change4life top tips leaflet, included with this letter.

***I think my child is heavy because it 'runs in our family'; it's in 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. So even with genes that make it more likely for you or your child to be overweight, a healthy lifestyle can still prevent this. In most situations, being overweight is caused by consuming more energy than we are burning over a long period of time, in other words eating too much and moving about too little. So, overweight can run in families, due to 'inheriting' an unhealthy lifestyle in terms of eating and physical activity habits. One of the top tips for helping your child maintain a healthy weight is to lead by example and be a positive role model.

***Telling me my child is overweight makes me feel like you are judging or criticising me as a parent.***

It's a very common feeling for parents and carers to have an emotional response to the NCMP letter.

Being told your child is overweight can be an upsetting experience but it certainly does not imply your parenting is at fault. Our modern lifestyles can make it difficult to maintain a healthy weight. We all have a role to play and it is everyone's responsibility to create a society where healthier choices become the easier choices. We think it is important to share your child's result with you and offer you help and support should you require it.

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

The NCMP has been carefully monitored since 2006 and there is no evidence as yet that there has been an increase in eating disorders in young people as a result. We understand weight can be a sensitive issue and every effort is made to carry out the process sensitively. We listen to feedback from parents and schools and use this to continually improve the way the programme is delivered. The risk of causing sensitivity about weight has to be balanced against the risk to our children of the current rates of overweight and obesity. From the data gathered through the NCMP, we know the proportion of underweight children has not increased (around one percent of children are underweight). Although the proportion of children with excess weight has significantly increased since the NCMP began.

***You've told me my child is 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. See the Change4life top tips leaflet, included with this letter.

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

Children can be tall and overweight, even if they are in proportion. Using BMI centiles takes both height and weight into account and is still an accurate indicator of when a child is carrying excess weight, even in tall children.