

What Is a Healthy Weight?

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Conventional approaches to weight management unquestioningly define “healthy weight” as slim (a BMI not above the “normal” range), or at least *slimmer* (since even obesity-prevention specialists acknowledge that sustainable weight loss of more than a few pounds is unlikely for most people categorized as obese). Bizarrely, this definition holds regardless of a person’s lifestyle habits. In other words, one is proclaimed to have a “healthy weight” even if their eating and/or fitness behaviors would never be deemed health-enhancing or sustainable, while those with fatter bodies whose behaviors model the very essence of healthy choices are excluded. Using this definition, weight loss is supported as a reasonable goal for anyone with visible fatness, despite substantial research documenting that the lowest mortality rates belong to those in the “overweight” BMI category. For those with a BMI of 30 or higher, dropping pounds is considered *essential* for health. Given the conventional approach, most lay people and healthcare providers today believe a prescribed plan for weight loss is the answer for any amount of fatness, despite an inarguable abundance of research showing that eating and exercise undertaken for the purpose of weight loss reliably leads to more fatness over time.

In stark contrast, health focused approaches (such as Health at Every Size®—HAES®) define “healthy weight” as an outcome of practices and applied principles that support overall health and well-being. This means that weight itself is explicitly *not* the focus. Instead, weight is understood to be a result—something that happens that may be influenced but not controlled, and that will show itself differently for different people. In other words, weight will be considered “healthy” when an individual engages over time in sustainable, life-enhancing behaviors taking into account that person’s physical, economic, social, spiritual, emotional, and other needs. The goal of living according to HAES® principles is not weight loss or weight gain, although either may be an outcome. HAES® is not pro or anti fat or thin; it is weight-neutral, respecting the fact that weights resulting from positive, sustainable self-care will vary significantly.