

EEK, That's My Ideal Weight? Understanding Ideal Weight and Target Weight

By [Jenna Birch](#) , January 15, 2016

You've likely been hearing about the obesity epidemic since you were a kid, growing up in a culture that was heavy on fatty food and light on substantial exercise — and the problem is now staggering. According to a 2015 [JAMA study](#), the roughly half of adult men and women in the United States have diabetes or prediabetes.

Maintaining a healthy weight, however, can help you stay strong for a long time. If you can control your weight early on, by your 40s, you'll reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke compared to those who are overweight. By your 50s and beyond, you'll lower your odds of health concerns like gallstones, hip and knee replacements, even cancer.

But what *is* your healthiest weight? If you're wondering about that magic number, the answer is not totally cut-and-dry — but there are some guidelines to consider.

Ideal Weight

When talking about ideal weight, Body Mass Index is always good place to start. Your BMI looks at weight in relation to height, and is an estimate of your total body fat. A number between 18.5 and 24.9 is generally considered ideal. That said, the calculation does not account for muscle mass and is only a rough estimate. A healthy BMI for a 5'4" woman would fall somewhere between 108 pounds and 145 pounds. A healthy BMI for a 5'9" guy would range from 125 to 168 pounds. Neither range will give you help you pick a precise goal weight.

Your ideal weight probably falls at an intersection: the number you feel best, where you're also at lowest risk of disease and your body is able to perform at optimum level. This might be the lowest weight you sustained for a length of time — not just briefly, like after a crash diet or a particularly bad illness. This might be the weight you maintained in high school.

For most, though, this “ideal” weight often also seems just a hair out of reach. Even if you’re kicking your workouts into high gear and hitting your weight-loss calorie goals, that last 5 or 10 pounds is notoriously tough to shave off and keep off. From an evolutionary point of view, your body has adapted to resist change and stay strong when food is scarce. As you lose weight and mimic famine, your body becomes more efficient, reducing its caloric needs to sustain function. So in order to keep losing weight, you have to continuously lower your daily calorie intake to see real results. That’s no easy task.

Target Weight

Reasonably, your target weight should probably be a little bit higher than your ideal weight. If you were fit, toned and healthy back high school, then perhaps start there. Choose a number that’s 5 or 10 pounds above your old teenage weight; you want your goal to feel realistic, achievable and sustainable.

If high school wasn’t your healthiest time, there are also [calculators](#) that render height-based ideal weights from formulas developed by scientists like in the 1970s and 1980s. Although they’re not perfect calculations, they’re decent reference points. From there, again, give yourself some believable wiggle room.

After you’ve zoned in on a target number, decide how fast you want to lose the weight or by what date you want to reach this goal. Generally, for weight loss that will actually last, you shouldn’t try to shed more than one or two pounds a week.

To help you keep track of your goals and daily calorie totals, download a weight-loss app [link to welwelwel article on apps]. These will tell you exactly how many calories you can consume everyday, factor in your exercise and help you reach your goals on time.

Finally, as you lose weight, be aware of how your body feels and reacts. If you’ve reached a healthy BMI and your disease risk is low, your body and brain are performing at a high level *and* your weight is stabilizing around a certain number... then you may have hit that happy, ultra-personal “ideal weight.”

Sources:

http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-06-19/lifestyle/sns-201306191930--tms--foodstylts--v-f20130619-20130619_1_weight-loss-body-mass-environmental-nutrition

<http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=2434682>

http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/adult_bmi/index.html#InterpretedAdults

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3891203/>

<http://www.webmd.com/diet/guide/happy-weight-vs-healthy-weight>

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/why-its-so-hard-to-lose-those-last-5-pounds/2014/05/20/c15b69f2-dae4-11e3-b745-87d39690c5c0_story.html