



Health Beyond BMI

Weight is often overemphasized as a benchmark for wellbeing, but it isn't the only metric that matters. Thinness isn't always synonymous with good health, and higher weights aren't always associated with poor health. When it comes to setting healthy intentions, it's good to measure your health in a variety of ways.



Body Mass Index (BMI) is a controversial weight-related metric that has been used since the 1800s as a proxy for body fatness.¹ However, because it cannot distinguish the difference between fat mass and non-fat mass (muscle, water, bone, and organs), it has limited utility.²

It is well-known that BMI doesn't accurately estimate body fat in certain groups, such as those who have lower muscle mass (older adults) or higher muscle mass (athletes). It also doesn't account for individual differences in race, gender, age, and ethnicity.

Despite these limitations, healthcare providers have used BMI as a screening tool for years. Fortunately, that may be changing. The American Medical Association recently

issued a new policy encouraging providers to use BMI only when used alongside other metrics.³

While there are many others, here are some alternative health metrics to consider when monitoring your wellbeing:

- Blood pressure
- Body temperature
- Resting heart rate
- Blood/Lab work
- Sleep patterns or quality
- Flexibility
- Strength
- Severity of symptoms
- Waist Circumference
- Body composition
- Energy levels
- Quality of life

It is also important to pay attention to changes in your metrics over time. This can help you identify patterns in your health. For example, if your cholesterol levels have been slowly rising over the past couple of years, it may indicate that it is time to make some lifestyle adjustments.

Ask your healthcare provider for guidance on which metrics are most relevant for your unique health needs, and speak up if you feel your weight is being overemphasized as a marker of your wellbeing.

Using a single reference point to measure anything is generally not advisable. It is not a good idea for measuring your health either.

1. Nuttall FQ. Body Mass Index: Obesity, BMI, and Health: A Critical Review. *Nutr Today*. 2015 May;50(3):117-128. doi: 10.1097/NT.0000000000000092. Epub 2015 Apr 7. PMID: 27340299; PMCID: PMC4890841.
2. Flegal, K.M. American Medical Association (AMA). [Use and Misuse of BMI Categories](#). *AMA Journal of Ethics*. Published Jul 2023. Accessed Sept 4, 2023.
3. American Medical Association (AMA). [AMA adopts new policy clarifying role of BMI as a measure in medicine](#). Published Jun 14, 2023. Accessed Sept 8, 2023.



How Does Intermittent Fasting Work?

If improving your eating habits is one of your healthy intentions, intermittent fasting (IF) may be worth considering.

Throughout history, people around the globe have used fasting for spiritual and health reasons. Intermittent fasting involves switching between periods of eating and not eating on a regular schedule.¹

Taking regular breaks from eating has several proposed health benefits. First, fasting reduces circulating insulin levels, which helps to promote fat breakdown.⁴ Additionally, when insulin levels are lower, your body doesn't convert as much glucose to fat.

Intermittent fasting can also promote weight loss. One study found that IF resulted in a 2.5–9.9% weight loss over 42 weeks.² This makes sense because as fat stores decline, weight loss occurs naturally.

Fasting also produces health improvements similar to low-carbohydrate diets, such as the ketogenic diet.³ In addition, studies have shown that these eating styles may improve insulin sensitivity, cardiovascular health, and inflammation markers.³

Intermittent fasting involves switching between periods of eating and not eating on a regular schedule.

| Fasting Schedule | Eating Window |
|------------------|---------------|
| 12/12 | 12 hours |
| 14/10 | 10 hours |
| 16/8 | 8 hours |
| 20/4 | 4 hours |

Typically, Intermittent fasting schedules have narrower eating windows. During fasting times, only water or zero-calorie drinks are allowed.

Intermittent fasting does pose some challenges. The narrower eating windows can make it difficult to consume enough essential nutrients each day to support and maintain good health. People who choose the more restrictive fasting schedules, such as the 20/4, may require medical supervision to ensure adequate nutrients are consumed.

Another challenge is sticking to IF long term. Clinical studies have seen subject dropout rates near 40%.²

Additionally, IF is not appropriate for people who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or have a history of disordered eating. It's always best to talk with your healthcare provider before making significant changes to your diet.

Whichever eating style you choose, make sure you're getting enough nutrients to support your body's needs.

1. Johns Hopkins Medicine. [Intermittent Fasting: What is it, and how does it work?](#) Accessed Aug 28, 2023.
2. Stockman MC, Thomas D, Burke J, Apovian CM. [Intermittent Fasting: Is the Wait Worth the Weight?](#) *Curr Obes Rep.* 2018 Jun;7(2):172-185. doi: 10.1007/s13679-018-0308-9. PMID: 29700718; PMCID: PMC5959807.
3. Sutton EF, Beyl R, Early KS, Cefalu WT, Ravussin E, Peterson CM. [Early Time-Restricted Feeding Improves Insulin Sensitivity, Blood Pressure, and Oxidative Stress Even without Weight Loss in Men with Prediabetes.](#) *Cell Metab.* 2018 Jun 5;27(6):1212-1221.e3. doi: 10.1016/j.cmet.2018.04.010. Epub 2018 May 10. PMID: 29754952; PMCID: PMC5990470.
4. Harvard Health. [Intermittent fasting: The positive news continues.](#) Feb 28, 2021. Accessed Sept 6, 2023.



Budget-Friendly Meal Planning Tips

Dining out may save you a little time in the short term, but it can easily derail your budget. Over time, the added expenses of driving to and from restaurants, paying for meals, and tipping can add up, even if you only dine out occasionally.

Cooking at home can save time and money with proper planning. In some cases, it may even save you thousands.¹

Try these budget-friendly tips to get healthy meals on the table without breaking the bank:

- **Plan ahead.** Planning is key when it comes to sticking to your food budget. Set aside time each week to plan menus and fine-tune your grocery list to get the most for your money.²
- **Choose simple recipes.** Recipes with fewer ingredients can help reduce your grocery bill. Look for simple recipes that don't require hard-to-find or expensive ingredients.
- **Stick with staples.** Steer clear of processed, convenience foods and stick to basic ingredients to keep costs lower.
- **Cook in large batches.** Large batches of soups, stews, and casseroles can be pre-portioned into individual servings and frozen for later use.
- **Make substitutions.** Be flexible with your menus and make cost-saving substitutions as needed. If you originally planned for green beans but broccoli is on sale, make a quick substitution.³
- **Maximize leftovers.** Leftovers can easily become second or third meals to help cut down on food expenses. Have leftovers for lunch, or designate a "salad night" each week to use up remaining ingredients.



- **Use grocery delivery services.** If you are prone to impulse purchases at the supermarket or have trouble sticking to your list, grocery delivery services may be a good option. While you will pay a little more for delivery fees, you can adjust your order before you click the 'buy' button.

Planning ahead and taking a few simple steps makes it easy to prepare healthy, affordable meals.

1. Reader's Digest. [Meal Plan Every Week—and It Saves Me Thousands of Dollars a Year](#). Updated Jan. 31, 2023. Accessed Aug 29, 2023.
2. US Department of Agriculture (USDA). [MyPlate](#). Accessed Aug 27, 2023.
3. PrepDish. [10 Tips for Frugal Meal Planning](#). Published Jul 11, 2023. Accessed Sept 1, 2023.

SPICED ROASTED BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

Cook Time
60 minutes

Servings
4-6

Ingredients

- 1 large butternut squash (2.5 lbs), halved vertically and seeded
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon olive oil, divided
- 1/8 teaspoon white pepper
- Salt and pepper
- Up to 3 cups vegetable broth (will depend on size of your squash - I used 2.5 cups)
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 2/3 cup canned coconut milk
- 1/4 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- Optional garnish: pepitas
- 3/4 teaspoon cardamom

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Brush squash with 1 teaspoon olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Turn squash cut side down and bake until tender, about 45-55 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon olive oil in a medium pot over medium heat. Add onion and cook until translucent, about 5-7 minutes. Transfer to high-speed blender if using it.
4. Once butternut squash is cooled, scoop out flesh and transfer to high-speed blender (or pot on stovetop if you don't have one).
5. Add pumpkin pie spice, cardamom, salt, white pepper, and up to 3 cups vegetable broth.
6. Set high-speed blender to soup setting or let blend at highest speed for 6 minutes. If using the stove top, bring to a boil and remove from heat. Use an immersion blender to puree until smooth and creamy.
7. Stir or blend in coconut milk. Season with additional salt, to taste.
8. Garnish with pepitas and a drizzle of coconut milk.



Nutrition Facts

| | |
|---------------|-------|
| Calories | 200 |
| Total Fat | 10g |
| Sodium | 588mg |
| Carbohydrate | 26g |
| Dietary Fiber | 5g |
| Protein | 5g |