

Risk factors FAQ

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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

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What are the preventable risk factors for cardiovascular disease?

Major preventable risk factors for cardiovascular disease include:

- tobacco smoking
- high blood pressure
- high blood cholesterol
- overweight
- physical inactivity
- nutritional factors
- Type 2 diabetes

See [Cardiovascular disease](#) for more information or for summary data, go to [Risk factors statistics](#).

What are the preventable risk factors for Type 2 diabetes?

Major preventable risk factors for Type 2 diabetes include:

- tobacco smoking
- high blood pressure
- high blood cholesterol
- overweight
- physical inactivity
- nutritional factors
- impaired glucose tolerance

See [Diabetes](#) for more information or for summary data, go to [Risk factors statistics](#).

How are overweight and obesity measured?

There are two methods for measuring overweight and obesity.

Body mass index

The Body Mass Index (BMI) is a commonly used and easy to apply measure. A person's BMI is equal to their weight in kilograms divided by the square of their height in metres.

The following classification, defined by the World Health Organization, is used for people aged 18 and over.

Table 1: Classification of BMI for people aged 18 and over

BMI (kg/m ²)	Classification	Risk of comorbidities
Less than 18.5	Underweight	Low (but risk of other clinical problems increased)
18.5 to less than 25	Normal weight range	Average
25 to less than 30	Overweight	Increased
30 or more	Obese	
30 to less than 35	Obese class 1	Moderate
35 to less than 40	Obese class 2	Severe
40 or more	Obese class 3	Very severe

For children and adolescents, different BMI cutoffs are required. See [Promoting Healthy Weight](#) (Department of Health and Ageing) for more information.

Waist circumference

Excess weight around the abdominal region is a good indicator of increased risk of developing chronic disease, particularly Type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease. Waist circumference is used to indicate abdominal overweight. The following classification is suitable only for persons aged 18 and over.

Table 2: Classification of waist circumference for people aged 18 and over

Risk of metabolic complications	Waist circumference		Classification
	Men	Women	
Increased	94 cm or more	80 cm or more	Abdominally overweight
Substantially increased	102 cm or more	88 cm or more	Abdominally obese

Go to [Overweight and obesity](#) for more information.

How much physical activity is sufficient?

There are two different ways of calculating 'sufficient' physical activity for health. These are:

1. the accumulation of a sufficient **amount** of activity over a week
2. the accumulation of a sufficient **amount** of activity by participation in a sufficient **number of sessions** over a week.

The *National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians* (DHAC 1999) recommend that, to achieve health benefits, a person should participate in 30 minutes of at least moderate-intensity physical activity on most days of the week. For the purposes of calculating 'sufficient' activity, this is interpreted as 30 minutes on at least 5 days of the week; a total of at least 150 minutes of activity per week. Therefore the two definitions of 'sufficient' above become:

1. the accumulation of at least **150 minutes** of activity over 1 week
2. the accumulation of at least **150 minutes** of activity and at least **5 sessions** of activity over 1 week.

Go to [Physical inactivity](#) for more information.