

The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP)

The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) is a Government programme across England. Children have their height and weight measured in Reception and Year 6 by a trained healthcare professional.

It is understandable that you may have some questions or concerns about the NCMP, so hopefully you may find the information below useful. If you have any further questions, please see the last point - “where can I go for further support?”

Should I tell my child their result?

The letter is sent to you, and the school won't tell your child the result, so this decision is entirely up to you.

Some parents decide to tell their children and talk about the changes they need to make together. Others decide not to, and make subtle changes (if needed) without their child noticing. There's no right or wrong answer, and the decision depends on your individual circumstances.

If you do choose to share the results with your child, let them know that all you want is for them to be healthy and happy and try to avoid focusing on words such as 'weight' and 'calories'. Instead, you may want to focus on the goal of physical and/or mental wellbeing, for example 'eating fruits and vegetables makes you strong' or 'physical activity can help you to feel happy and energetic'.

If your child is overweight, there's lots you can do to help your child become a healthy weight as they grow. Getting your child to eat well and move more is important and we are here to support you with making these changes.

I'm worried about addressing my child's weight with them as they are only young and I don't want to upset them or cause any lasting damage.

Weight can be a very sensitive topic, especially in young people, and that is why we offer support from trained specialists who can help you to have these conversations.

The NCMP has been carefully monitored since it began, and there is no evidence as yet that there has been an increase in eating disorders in young people as a result. The emotional impact of the NCMP has been researched and studies show that body image, self-esteem, weight-related teasing and restrictive eating behaviours do not change as a result of being measured or receiving feedback. If you are concerned about your child's growth, weight, body image or eating patterns, seek further support from a school nurse or GP. We listen to feedback from parents and schools and use this to continually improve the way the programme is delivered.

I've heard that using Body Mass Index (BMI) to assess weight is not very accurate. Why is it used?

The body mass index (BMI) measure is a good way of finding out whether a child is a healthy weight. It has been found to be the most accurate and accessible method currently available for assessing weight in children, and is recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

By comparing your child's weight with their age, height and sex, we can tell whether they're growing as expected. This is something you may have done when your child was a baby using the growth charts in the Personal Child Health Record (red book).

You may have heard some negativities around BMI, for example that it isn't very accurate, and you may be concerned that it doesn't take in to account the fact that your child is still growing. However, the BMI used for children is different to that of adults and takes in to account the child's age and sex.

If you would like help interpreting your child's result, please contact the NCMP team on eh.ncmp.healthyyou@nhs.net

My letter says that my child is overweight, but I disagree with this. What should I do?

It is important to note that there are some limitations to using BMI centiles to assess weight in children. However, in the majority of cases the result is accurate.

If the BMI centile suggests your child is overweight and you disagree with this assessment, then you may want to contact the NCMP team or your child's school nurse or GP who will be able to discuss this further with you.

What happens with the data? Will people be able to find out my child's results?

The data is held by the local authority and sent to NHS Digital and the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID, formerly Public Health England), where it is stored securely and used for analysis. NCMP data results are closely protected with no information about individual children's weights or heights disclosed to school staff or to other pupils. All data used for analysis purposes is anonymised so your child cannot be identified.

You've told me that we can access healthy lifestyle support for the whole family through the local healthy lifestyle service, Healthy You, but I don't want my child to go on a diet.

This is absolutely not what will be promoted within our Healthy You service. Calories and weight loss will not be mentioned – instead your Health Trainer will talk about energy balance, healthy eating and physical activity. You will learn how to make small and simple changes to help your family eat more healthily and be more active. It is not about going on a diet; instead it is all about making sustainable lifestyle changes as a family which will help to promote good health both now, and in the future.

I don't think my child looks overweight compared with their friends.

As a parent, it can be difficult to tell if your child is overweight. Because increasing numbers of children are overweight, we are all becoming used to seeing heavier children as the norm. This means that we can't always tell when a child is overweight compared with their friends or siblings. That is why many parents find it helpful to have an objective measurement of how their child is growing (as provided by the NCMP) and be given the opportunity to seek support if necessary. Whilst genetics can play a role in influencing a child's size, lifestyle factors (such as what they eat and how much physical activity they do) contribute too.

Being told your child is overweight can be an upsetting experience, but it certainly does not imply your parenting is at fault. It can be difficult for parents today to make sure that their children eat healthily and are as active as possible. Our modern lifestyles mean that unhealthy foods and drinks are readily available and technology

(such as phones, TV's and video games) mean that children aren't always as active as we might like them to be.

My child is very active – will their BMI be inaccurate because of muscle mass?

Whilst this can sometimes be the case with adults it is unlikely to be the case with children, especially if they are in reception.

Increases in muscular tissue usually do not occur until after puberty has started. The sex hormones, particularly testosterone, are responsible for changes in body composition observed following puberty. Prior to puberty these hormones are not usually present in sufficient quantities to stimulate muscular development and create differences in body make-up, even in children who are very physically active.

Why does it matter if my child is overweight? They're still young, won't they just grow out of it?

Even when children are very young, being overweight can have a negative impact on their physical and mental wellbeing.

We know from the data collected since the NCMP started in the 2005/2006 academic year that most children who are overweight in Reception will remain overweight for their age by year 6, without action to achieve a healthier weight. Furthermore, we know that a proportion of children who are overweight will continue to be overweight in to adulthood which increases the risk of certain health problems.

You can encourage the whole family to enjoy eating healthily and being active, which will help your child achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Children who see their parents, grandparents and carers following a healthy and active lifestyle tend to join in and learn by example. You can get support to do this through your local healthy lifestyle service, [Healthy You](#).

How can I keep track of my child's weight?

We wouldn't recommend weighing your child too often, however you can calculate and keep track of your child's BMI using the NHS website - <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/>. As discussed earlier, the BMI calculation for children is different than that for adults, so it is important that you use the child specific tab of the BMI calculator.

The aim with children isn't necessarily to lose weight, but to instead make small and simple changes to their eating and/or physical activity levels which should help their BMI to level out as they grow taller.

Where can I go for further support?

If your child's NCMP letter surprised or worried you, there are plenty of people and services who can help you to talk things through, and offer you support and advice if you would like it.

You can contact the Healthy You NCMP Team on eh.ncmp.healthyyou@nhs.net.

You can also get healthy lifestyle support for the whole family through your local healthy lifestyle service, Healthy You:

Website - www.healthyyou.org.uk
Email – eh.healthyyou@nhs.net
Text – Healthyu to 60777



We have a local Healthy Families Directory which you may find useful to find out about information and support on healthy eating and physical activity:

<https://healthyschoolscp.org.uk/healthy-families-nutrition-and-physical-activity-directory/>

You may like to join our local Healthy You, Healthier Families Challenge. You can sign up here: <https://healthyyou.org.uk/healthy-eating/>

Fun ideas to help your family stay healthy can also be found on the NHS website at <https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/>

Further information about the NCMP can be found at www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/national-child-measurement-programme

You can also speak to your child's GP, practice nurse or their school nurse