

 WHATSHOULDIWEIGH.COM

# WHAT SHOULD I USE?



What's worth using, what's worth paying for, and what to skip.

A free companion guide to the calculators at [whatshouldiweigh.com](https://whatshouldiweigh.com)

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## 00 HOW THIS LIST WAS MADE

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Selections here are based on published research, official documentation, pricing, and commentary from qualified professionals. **They are editorial judgments, not personal product testing.** This site has not individually tested every app, book or piece of equipment listed, and inclusion is not a claim that any of it will work for you.

Where I give an opinion, it's written as an opinion. Where a figure comes from research, the source is listed at the back so you can check it yourself. Where the evidence is genuinely unsettled, I've said that too rather than picking a number that sounds authoritative.

**FREE** Costs nothing.

**PAID** Costs money, and in my judgment earns it.

**AFFILIATE** A link that may pay this site a commission at no extra cost to you.

### THIS IS NOT MEDICAL ADVICE

Everything here is general education. Nothing in this guide diagnoses, treats or prevents any condition, and none of it substitutes for advice from your doctor or a registered dietitian who knows your history. Talk to a professional before changing how you eat, train or supplement — particularly if you are pregnant or nursing, under 18, over 65, managing a medical condition, or taking medication that affects appetite, blood sugar or metabolism.

## AFFILIATE DISCLOSURE

Items marked **Affiliate** link to recommendation pages on [whatshouldiweigh.com](https://whatshouldiweigh.com). Some of those pages contain affiliate links, and if you make a qualifying purchase through one this site may earn a commission at no additional cost to you. **There are no affiliate links inside this document itself.** Commissions do not determine what appears here — many of the strongest recommendations in this guide, including the government databases, the free tracking tools and every podcast listed, earn nothing at all.

## 01 START HERE — FREE CALCULATORS

Ten tools on this site. No sign-up, nothing stored, everything runs in your browser.

### What Should I Weigh **FREE**

Your healthy weight range by height, with four classic ideal-weight formulas compared.

[whatshouldiweigh.com](https://whatshouldiweigh.com)

### BMI Calculator **FREE**

Body mass index, the category it falls in, and the weight range that maps to.

[whatshouldiweigh.com/bmi-calculator](https://whatshouldiweigh.com/bmi-calculator)

### Body Fat Percentage **FREE**

The US Navy tape method. No calipers or scan required. Less precise than a laboratory measurement, and your measuring technique affects the result more than the equation does.

[whatshouldiweigh.com/body-fat-calculator](https://whatshouldiweigh.com/body-fat-calculator)

### Waist Ratios **FREE**

Waist-to-height and waist-to-hip. UK NICE guidance recommends waist-to-height alongside BMI, because it picks up central fat that BMI misses.

[whatshouldiweigh.com/waist-to-height-calculator](https://whatshouldiweigh.com/waist-to-height-calculator)

### Daily Calorie Needs (TDEE) **FREE**

Maintenance calories using the Mifflin–St Jeor equation, plus targets for losing and gaining.

[whatshouldiweigh.com/tdee-calorie-calculator](https://whatshouldiweigh.com/tdee-calorie-calculator)

### BMR Calculator **FREE**

Resting metabolism across three published equations, side by side.

[whatshouldiweigh.com/bmr-calculator](https://whatshouldiweigh.com/bmr-calculator)

### Calories Burned **FREE**

28 activities by MET value from the Compendium of Physical Activities, scaled to your body weight.

[whatshouldiweigh.com/calories-burned-calculator](https://whatshouldiweigh.com/calories-burned-calculator)

### Macro Split **FREE**

Calories into protein, carbs and fat, and grams per meal.

[whatshouldiweigh.com/macro-calculator](https://whatshouldiweigh.com/macro-calculator)

### Protein Intake **FREE**

Daily protein range by body weight and goal, using ISSN and ACSM reference ranges.

[whatshouldiweigh.com/protein-calculator](https://whatshouldiweigh.com/protein-calculator)

### Water Intake **FREE**

A starting fluid target for your body weight, training and climate.

[whatshouldiweigh.com/water-intake-calculator](https://whatshouldiweigh.com/water-intake-calculator)

## 02 GOVERNMENT & INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

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Free, authoritative, and nobody is selling you anything. Chronically underused.

### MyPlate **FREE**

USDA dietary guidance. Plans, recipes and a quiz that produces a sensible starting point.

[myplate.gov](https://myplate.gov)

### NIH Body Weight Planner **FREE**

Built on a metabolic model that accounts for the way energy needs fall as body weight does, rather than the flat 3,500-calorie rule. Its timelines tend to be longer, and more realistic, than most commercial tools.

[niddk.nih.gov/bwp](https://niddk.nih.gov/bwp)

### USDA FoodData Central **FREE**

The nutrient database many tracking apps draw from. Go here when an entry looks wrong.

[fdc.nal.usda.gov](https://fdc.nal.usda.gov)

### NIH Office of Dietary Supplements **FREE**

Plain-language fact sheets on common supplements, including what the evidence shows and where it's thin. Worth reading before buying anything.

[ods.od.nih.gov](https://ods.od.nih.gov)

### Dietary Guidelines for Americans **FREE**

The source document behind most US nutrition advice. Dry, but it's the primary text.

[dietaryguidelines.gov](https://dietaryguidelines.gov)

### CDC Healthy Weight **FREE**

BMI reference, waist guidance, and an unusually clear official explanation of what those numbers do and don't mean.

[cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth](https://cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth)

### NHS Better Health (UK) **FREE**

A free 12-week weight-loss plan and the Eatwell Guide. Useful wherever you live.

[nhs.uk/better-health](https://nhs.uk/better-health)

## 03 EVIDENCE & RESEARCH

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For checking a claim before you act on it.

### Examine.com **FREE** **PAID TIER**

Independent analysis of supplements and nutrition interventions, graded by evidence strength. Takes no money from supplement companies, which is both why it charges and why I trust it.

[examine.com](https://examine.com)

### PubMed **FREE**

The index of published biomedical research. Abstracts are free. Read the methods before the conclusion.

[pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)

### Cochrane Library **FREE SUMMARIES**

Systematic reviews, generally placed at the top of the evidence hierarchy. Plain-language summaries are free.

[cochranelibrary.com](https://cochranelibrary.com)

### MASS Research Review **PAID**

Monthly breakdowns of new strength and nutrition research by researchers who also coach. For people who want depth.

[massresearchreview.com](https://massresearchreview.com)

## Alan Aragon's Research Review PAID

Long-running monthly review with a reputation for criticizing weak studies regardless of which side they favour.

[alanaragon.com](http://alanaragon.com)

## 04 TRACKING APPS & SOFTWARE

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Pick one and use it for two weeks. Learning what portions look like is the real benefit; the numbers are secondary.

### Cronometer FREE TIER

Draws much of its database from verified sources rather than user submissions, and tracks micronutrients — which most alternatives handle poorly.

[cronometer.com](http://cronometer.com)

### MyFitnessPal FREE TIER

The largest food database by a distance, so almost anything you eat is already in it. The trade-off is that much of it is user-entered and some entries are wrong. Verify anything surprising.

[myfitnesspal.com](http://myfitnesspal.com)

### MacroFactor PAID

Adjusts your calorie target from your own weight and intake data rather than a population formula. My first suggestion for anyone who has stalled and can't work out why.

[macrofactorapp.com](http://macrofactorapp.com)

### Trendweight FREE

Does one thing: smooths daily weight noise into a trend line. Free, syncs with common smart scales, and almost nobody knows about it.

[trendweight.com](http://trendweight.com)

### Happy Scale (iOS) / Libra (Android) FREE TIER

The same idea in app form. Stops you reacting to an overnight swing that reflects fluid and gut contents rather than fat.

### Hevy / Strong FREE TIER

Lifting logs. Knowing what you lifted last session is the simplest way to keep making progress.

## 05 MEASUREMENT TOOLS

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You can't use several of the calculators on this site without a tape measure. Most of this is inexpensive.

### Body tape measure AFFILIATE

A retracting tape with a tension mechanism helps you apply similar pressure each time, which matters because inconsistent tension is a common source of measurement variation. Typically under \$10.

[View our recommendations →](#)

### Digital bathroom scale AFFILIATE

Any scale with fine resolution will do. Weighing under consistent conditions matters more than the device — same time of day, same circumstances.

[View our recommendations →](#)

### Smart scale with body composition AFFILIATE

Estimates body fat by bioelectrical impedance. Validation studies disagree with each other: some find close agreement with DXA scans, others find differences of several percentage points in either direction, and accuracy varies with hydration, sex, body fat level and device.

**Don't buy it for the absolute number.** Buy it because it logs weight automatically and graphs the trend — which removes the main reason people stop tracking.

[View our recommendations →](#)

### Skinfold calipers AFFILIATE

Cheap, and reasonable in trained hands taking readings the same way each time. Self-measurement is considerably harder to keep consistent.

[View our recommendations →](#)

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### DEXA scan PAID

Widely used as a body-composition benchmark in research and clinical settings, and priced accordingly. Worth considering once if you want a benchmark; not something to repeat monthly.

Search “DEXA body composition” and your city

## 06 KITCHEN & FOOD PREP

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Where tracking either becomes easy or gets abandoned.

### Digital food scale AFFILIATE

My pick for the single most useful item on this list. Estimating portions by eye is a well-documented source of error in self-reported intake, and a scale removes it. Usually around \$12; a tare function is the only feature that matters.

[View our recommendations →](#)

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### Meal prep containers AFFILIATE

Portioned, stackable, microwave-safe. Often decides whether “I’ll cook properly this week” survives past Tuesday.

[View our recommendations →](#)

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### Shaker bottle AFFILIATE

If you use protein powder. That’s the whole review.

[View our recommendations →](#)

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### Marked water bottle AFFILIATE

A bottle of known volume turns a daily fluid target into counting refills instead of guessing.

[View our recommendations →](#)

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## 07 TRAINING EQUIPMENT

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Resistance training is consistently recommended alongside a calorie deficit, because it helps preserve lean mass while you lose fat. Worth prioritizing, whatever else you do.

### Resistance bands AFFILIATE

The cheapest entry to resistance training, typically around \$20, and enough for a beginner to progress for months. A reasonable starting point before committing to a gym membership.

[View our recommendations →](#)

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### Adjustable dumbbells AFFILIATE

In my view the most useful single purchase for home training. Expensive up front, cheaper than a couple of years of gym fees.

[View our recommendations →](#)

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### Walking pad / under-desk treadmill AFFILIATE

Targets everyday movement, which is a substantial share of daily energy expenditure for most people and tends to decline during a diet without you noticing.

[View our recommendations →](#)

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### Treadmill, bike or elliptical AFFILIATE

Worth it if the genuine barrier to your cardio is leaving the house. Be honest about that before spending four figures.

[View our recommendations →](#)

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### Fitness tracker or watch AFFILIATE

Good for step counts and consistency. Treat the calorie figure with caution: a systematic review of wrist-worn devices found mean absolute error above 30% for every brand tested, concluding none was accurate for energy expenditure. Useful for comparing your own weeks, not for deciding what to eat.

[View our recommendations →](#)

## 08 BOOKS

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Understanding why your body does what it does tends to outlast another meal plan.

### The Hungry Brain — Stephan Guyenet AFFILIATE

Why appetite regulation works the way it does, from a neuroscientist. The clearest treatment I've found of why willpower isn't the variable people assume.

[View our recommendations →](#)

### Burn — Herman Pontzer AFFILIATE

An evolutionary biologist on energy expenditure, including research suggesting exercise raises total daily burn less than commonly assumed. Changes how you think about “earning” food.

[View our recommendations →](#)

### Ultra-Processed People — Chris van Tulleken AFFILIATE

On what industrial food does to intake. In my view it occasionally overstates its case; still worth reading.

[View our recommendations →](#)

### Atomic Habits — James Clear AFFILIATE

Not about weight, and more useful than many books that are. Behaviour change is usually the bottleneck.

[View our recommendations →](#)

### The Renaissance Diet 2.0 — Israetel, Hoffmann & Davis AFFILIATE

A structured, research-referenced approach to diet for people who train. Technical, and clear about which variables matter most.

[View our recommendations →](#)

### Bigger Leaner Stronger / Thinner Leaner Stronger — Michael Matthews AFFILIATE

Practical beginner programs with sensible nutrition guidance. Two versions of much the same book.

[View our recommendations →](#)

### Outlive — Peter Attia AFFILIATE

Longevity and metabolic health rather than weight specifically. Strong on why muscle mass and cardiorespiratory fitness deserve more attention than the scale.

[View our recommendations →](#)

## 09 PODCASTS

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Free, and a low-effort way to absorb the research over time.

### Sigma Nutrition Radio FREE

Danny Lennon interviews researchers about their own work. The most rigorous nutrition podcast I've come across, and among the least sensational.

### Iron Culture FREE

Eric Helms and Omar Isuf on training and nutrition evidence. Long-form, and unusually willing to say when the data is unclear.

### Barbell Medicine Podcast FREE

Physicians who lift, on training, pain, nutrition and health. Reliably takes apart fitness-industry claims.

### **ZOE Science & Nutrition** FREE

Accessible interviews with nutrition researchers. ZOE sells a testing product, so weigh episodes touching their own service accordingly.

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### **The Proof** — Simon Hill FREE

Nutrition and longevity research, leaning plant-forward. Good interviews, and open about its perspective.

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### **FoundMyFitness** — Rhonda Patrick FREE

Deep biochemistry. Dense, and in my view sometimes more enthusiastic about early findings than the evidence supports.

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## **10 EDUCATORS WORTH FOLLOWING**

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Free content from people who cite their sources.

### **Jeff Nippard** FREE

Training science explained clearly and referenced properly. My first recommendation for free strength-training education.

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### **Layne Norton (Biolayne)** FREE

PhD in nutritional sciences who spends much of his time correcting diet misinformation. Blunt.

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### **Renaissance Periodization** FREE

Mike Israetel on hypertrophy and diet. Technical content delivered more entertainingly than it has any right to be.

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### **Abbey Sharp** FREE

Registered dietitian reviewing influencer diets and “what I eat in a day” videos. Useful inoculation against the rest of the internet.

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## **11 PROFESSIONAL HELP**

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The point at which a calculator stops being the right tool.

### **Find a Registered Dietitian** FREE DIRECTORY

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics directory. An RD is a credentialed clinician; “nutritionist” is an unregulated title in many places. The distinction is worth knowing.

[eatright.org/find-a-nutrition-expert](https://eatright.org/find-a-nutrition-expert)

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### **Your doctor**

Before starting anything significant, and specifically if your weight has changed without explanation. Thyroid and other metabolic conditions are straightforward to test for.

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### **Certified trainers** FREE DIRECTORIES

ACSM, NSCA and NASM publish directories of certified professionals. Certification isn't a guarantee of quality, but its absence tells you something.

[acsm.org/find-a-pro](https://acsm.org/find-a-pro)

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### IF THIS IS BECOMING SOMETHING ELSE

Tracking can tip into something harder. If food, weight or exercise is taking up more of your thoughts than you want, if you're skipping meals to "make up" for eating, or if a number on a scale is setting the tone of your day — that's worth talking to someone about, and it is common.

#### **National Alliance for Eating Disorders Helpline — 1-866-662-1235**

Free and confidential, staffed by licensed therapists who specialize in eating disorders. Open 9:00 am – 7:00 pm ET, Monday to Friday. Also at [allianceforeatingdisorders.com](http://allianceforeatingdisorders.com).

**That line is not a 24-hour crisis service.** If you need someone right now, call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), or text **ALLIANCE** to **741-741**. Both are free and available 24/7.

An eating disorder can become a physical emergency without any suicidal intent. If you are fainting, experiencing chest pain, an irregular heartbeat, severe dehydration, or another potentially serious symptom, call **911** or go to your nearest emergency department.

No calculator on any website, including mine, is equipped to help with this. A person is.

## 12 WHAT TO SKIP

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Often the most useful part of a resource list.

### **Detox teas, cleanses and “fat burners”**

No credible evidence of fat loss. Several act as laxatives or diuretics, which moves the scale by shifting water and gut contents rather than fat.

### **Any product promising results without diet change**

The FTC treats claims of substantial weight loss without diet or exercise as facially deceptive in advertising. If a sales page makes one, tread carefully and do your own due diligence before buying anything from that seller.

### **Body wraps, vibration belts and spot-reduction devices**

Spot reduction is not supported by the evidence. Fat is mobilised from across the body, and the pattern is largely genetic.

### **Very low calorie diets without supervision**

At low intakes it becomes difficult to meet nutrient requirements. These exist as medically supervised programs for a reason.

### **Anything sold behind a countdown timer**

Artificial urgency is a sales technique, not a feature of good products.

## 13 PRINTABLE 12-WEEK TRACKER

Print this page. Weigh under the same conditions each time, then record the average of your daily readings for the week — the weekly average tells you far more than any single morning does.

| WK | DATE | WEEKLY AVG WEIGHT | WAIST | CHANGE | NOTES — TRAINING, SLEEP, APPETITE |
|----|------|-------------------|-------|--------|-----------------------------------|
| 1  |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 2  |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 3  |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 4  |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 5  |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 6  |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 7  |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 8  |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 9  |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 10 |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 11 |      |                   |       |        |                                   |
| 12 |      |                   |       |        |                                   |

**Reading it:** flat weeks are normal even when everything is being done right, and body weight moves with fluid, sodium and gut contents independently of fat. Judge the direction across three or four weeks rather than reacting to any single row. If the waist column is moving while the weight column isn't, that is progress the scale can't see.

## SOURCES

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Every research figure quoted in this guide, and where it comes from.

### Resting metabolism equation

Mifflin MD, St Jeor ST, et al. "A new predictive equation for resting energy expenditure in healthy individuals." *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 1990. Recommended as the default for healthy adults by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

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### Body fat from tape measurements

Hodgdon JA & Beckett MB, US Navy circumference equations, Naval Health Research Center, 1984.

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### Activity energy costs (MET values)

Ainsworth BE, et al. *Compendium of Physical Activities*, 2011 update. [pacompendium.com](http://pacompendium.com)

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### Fitness tracker accuracy

Fuller D, et al. "Reliability and Validity of Commercially Available Wearable Devices" and Germini F, et al. "Accuracy and Acceptability of Wrist-Wearable Activity-Tracking Devices: Systematic Review of the Literature." *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 2022;24(1):e30791. Found mean absolute percentage error above 30% for energy expenditure across all brands tested.

[jmir.org/2022/1/e30791](http://jmir.org/2022/1/e30791)

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### Bioelectrical impedance vs DXA

Findings conflict across studies. Sun G, et al., *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 2005 (591 subjects, mean difference  $-1.83 \pm 4.10\%$ ); Olinto M, et al., *Journal of Functional Morphology and Kinesiology*, 2024 (BIA read 4.4% lower than DXA). Agreement varies with hydration, sex, adiposity and device.

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### Waist-to-height ratio

UK National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), obesity assessment guidance. Waist circumference cut-points from the World Health Organization, *Waist Circumference and Waist-Hip Ratio: Report of a WHO Expert Consultation*, 2008.

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### Protein intake ranges

International Society of Sports Nutrition position stand on protein and exercise; American College of Sports Medicine / Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics joint position stand on nutrition and athletic performance.

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### Weight-loss advertising claims

US Federal Trade Commission, *Gut Check: A Reference Guide for Media on Spotting False Weight Loss Claims*.

[ftc.gov — Gut Check reference guide](https://www.ftc.gov/gut-check-reference-guide)

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### BMI classification

World Health Organization adult BMI categories; US National Institutes of Health clinical guidelines.

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### Eating disorder helpline details

National Alliance for Eating Disorders, verified against their published treatment and helpline page.

[allianceforeatingdisorders.com/find-treatment](https://allianceforeatingdisorders.com/find-treatment)

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## DISCLOSURES

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### HOW RESOURCES WERE SELECTED

Entries were chosen on the basis of published research, official documentation, professional commentary and publicly available product information. They represent editorial judgment rather than personal testing: this site has not individually tested every app, book, service or piece of equipment listed here. Inclusion is not a guarantee of quality, suitability or results, and is not an endorsement of everything a third party publishes or sells.

Where research figures are cited, they are drawn from published literature and described as ranges or findings rather than settled facts, because in several of these areas the evidence genuinely disagrees with itself. Where an opinion is given, it is identified as one.

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proportion of this guide, including all government resources, all podcasts and several of the tools recommended most strongly, generates no revenue for this site.

## **MEDICAL DISCLAIMER**

The content of this guide and of [whatshouldiweigh.com](https://whatshouldiweigh.com) is provided for general educational and informational purposes only. It does not constitute medical advice and is not a substitute for diagnosis, treatment or advice from a qualified healthcare professional who knows your individual circumstances.

The calculators and formulas referenced here produce population-level estimates that may not apply to you as an individual. Body composition measurement methods vary in accuracy, and published validation studies frequently disagree. No statement in this guide has been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration, and nothing here is intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

Always consult your physician or another qualified health provider before starting any diet, exercise or supplementation program, and before making changes if you are pregnant or nursing, under 18, have a medical condition, or take medication. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay seeking it because of something you have read here. If you think you may have a medical emergency, contact your doctor or emergency services immediately.

## **ACCURACY & CURRENCY**

Resources were selected and links checked in good faith at the time of writing. Third-party products, prices, availability, ownership and content change without notice. Please use your own judgment, and let us know if you find a link that no longer works.

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