

## Labels

Three issues that repeatedly come up in the news or in social media have to do with Body Mass Index (BMI), nutrition labeling on foods, and calling women of a certain weight and build “plus-size.”

As a clinician treating eating disorders, these issues really frustrate and anger me.

We do have an obesity epidemic in this country, to be sure, and the BMI is one way of determining who may fall into this category. It's calculated using one's weight and height.

The main flaw: It's an indirect measure of body fat that doesn't take into account important details about age, sex, bone structure, and fat distribution, one study in the [Journal of Obesity](#) explained. Again, it's just two numbers: weight divided by height squared.

Many athletes would be classified as obese because of their muscle and bone mass. Several school systems in our country have sent home “report cards” on children, using only the BMI to basically label a child as “fat.” There is no good reason to subject anyone to the potential body image disturbance that could come with such an arbitrary measure.

Nutrition labeling helps consumers make informed choices about the foods they eat, presumably so that they can make healthy dietary choices. As with the BMI, when education and wise discretion is applied, this is useful. However, in the U.K., there was recently a proposal to include in food labeling how much exercise is needed to burn off calories consumed. Again, this does not take into account individual differences in metabolic rate that come with age and gender. Presumably, the labeling would encourage people to exercise and would promote health. I highly doubt that this would be the consequence; instead, it could actually be a deterrent to exercise! Also, there is much more to a healthy food choice than calories alone.

For eating-disordered sufferers, who are already obsessed with numbers, this could actually be deadly. *Eating is not a math equation!!*

And finally: labeling models, clothing, or people (usually women) in general, as “plus-sized”, needs to be eradicated, in my opinion. The average woman is larger than the fashion industry's definition of what is acceptable or beautiful. I'm not going to get into numbers here (my website is [www.nomorennumbers.com](http://www.nomorennumbers.com) for a reason), but typically, a runway model who simply has CURVES is called a plus-sized model.

And we wonder why girls have body image disturbances.

-Susan Landry, LPC