



Courtesy photo

Angela Bailey, RN/surgery manager at Samaritan North Lincoln Hospital, visits the Siletz Tribal Head Start classroom in Lincoln City during Community Helper Week.

## CEDARR

### Community Efforts Demonstrating the Ability to Rebuild and Restore

#### Mission Statement

We will utilize resources to prevent the use of alcohol and other drugs, delinquency and violence; we will seek to reduce the barriers to treatment and support those who choose abstinence.

March 1 • Noon

Siletz Community Health Clinic  
200 Gwee-Shut Road, Siletz



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For more information about the Siletz Tribe, please visit [ctsi.nsn.us](http://ctsi.nsn.us).

## What is BMI and why does Head Start track it?

By Nancy Ludwig, MS, RD, LD, Siletz Tribal Head Start Nutrition

As part of my role as a consultant nutritionist to Siletz Tribal Head Start, I offer information for families. This segment focuses on what may seem like an uncomfortable topic – BMI, or your child's proportion of height versus weight.

Head Start children are young, they have a lot of growing ahead and this may appear to be a non-concern. Why does Head Start measure children and then refer some children to see their doctor? This can be confusing and may feel like some families are being singled out without actually receiving a benefit.

Siletz Tribal Head Start is required to track growth as well as other health information. One purpose behind measuring health indicators is to measure outcomes and therefore possible success or shortcomings of the program.

If the program demonstrates success, funding seems more likely to continue. On the other hand, if health indicators indicate increased risk, a closer look is needed. This may mean changes to the program to better support families.

Children's health and nutrition indicators are monitored in two primary ways:

1. Nutrition screening forms at parent orientation with questions about your child's eating habits
2. Periodic measurements of weight and height for all students (with confiden-

tiality in place). High and low BMI values trigger a potential risk and therefore, a referral. This does not necessarily mean there is a problem, but it is currently the action point to provide extra care for this child. A referral may be in the form of a letter requesting that you follow up with your doctor. Another option would be to talk to me, the consulting dietitian/nutritionist. This service is available to all Head Start families even if BMI is normal. The program is currently considering other approaches to support families. We are open to your feedback and want to support all Head Start families and the health of the Tribal community.

So what is BMI? BMI stands for Body Mass Index. BMI is a number calculated from a person's height and weight. It is also called height to weight, because that is a friendlier way to state the relationship that helps to evaluate growth.

BMI measurements are an easy and inexpensive way for medical personnel and public health programs to track health indicators. Measurements between the 85<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> percentile are associated with risk of being overweight.

This brings up an awkward subject leading to the question "Is my child getting fat?" Maybe yes, maybe no. Statistics are not all perfect. They are screening tools that prompt us to look into the situation further. We also must use common sense and good judgment.

Mathematically, it means that your child is growing heavier faster than he or she is growing tall. This might change naturally because children don't grow proportionately through growth spurts and your child might have gained weight in anticipation of shooting tall.

It is important to look at this number over time, not just once. BMI is more complex in children than adults. The BMI of children changes based on gender and age. Therefore, to make the discussion easier, BMI is converted to percentiles.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at [cdc.gov/healthy-weight/assessing/bmi/](http://cdc.gov/healthy-weight/assessing/bmi/) provides free calculators and information. Be sure to look for the one for children between 2-19 years old if this is for your Head Start child.

BMI percentiles are grouped into weight categories for children of the same sex and age:

- Underweight: below the 5<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Healthy Weight: 5<sup>th</sup> percentile up to the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Overweight: 85<sup>th</sup> percentile up to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile
- Obese: 95<sup>th</sup> percentile or higher

High BMI is associated with increased likelihood of:

- High blood pressure and high cholesterol (risk factors for cardiovascular disease)
- Increased risk of type-2 diabetes or insulin resistance

- Breathing problems like sleep apnea or asthma
- Joint problems and musculoskeletal discomfort
- Fatty liver disease, gallstones and gastro-esophageal reflux (GERD)
- Risk of social and psychological problems from possible discrimination or poor self-esteem
- Becoming obese adults with additional health risks

Low BMI also can be associated with risk:

- BMI can dip in a growth spurt but also can signal a problem that warrants medical attention, especially if your child is not gaining weight or has recently lost noticeable weight, has diarrhea, vomiting, poor appetite or low energy level

*Siletz Tribal Head Start offers my time at no cost to you to support family nutrition over the telephone. If you have nutrition concerns about your Head Start child, please contact me via your teacher or DeAnn Brown, program director.*

*I listen for how your child is being supported to learn healthy eating habits and build on your successes. I listen for possible power struggles around meal times, food security issues, food aversions and more.*

*Together we focus on goals to empower families to feel good about the choices they make. Healthy children make for healthy communities. We are in this together.*