

# Non-Communicable Diseases Watch



衛生防護中心  
Centre for Health Protection



衛生署  
Department of Health

April  
2026



## Weight Management Across the Life-course

### Key Messages

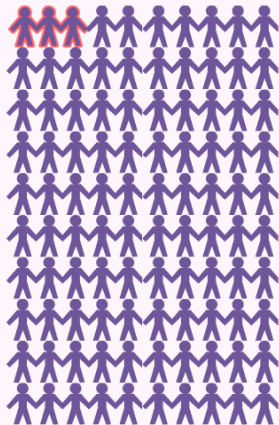
- At every stage of life, weight management is an integral part of wellness enhancement and preventive care. Having an unhealthy weight—whether too high or too low—would increase the risk of chronic diseases and premature death.
- Essential elements of weight management include recognising what constitutes a healthy weight, maintaining a balance between energy intake and expenditure along with practising healthy lifestyle habits that play a role in weight control.
- Weight management is not a short-term action, but a lifelong health strategy. The key to success is through the adoption of healthy lifestyle, in particular changes in eating and physical activity habits for the long haul. Let's act now and kickstart our weight management journey with passion and determination!

# Overweight and Obesity: A Global Public Health Problem

The soaring prevalence of overweight and obesity across the globe has become a critical public health issue. In 2022, an estimated 2.5 billion adults aged 18 years and older worldwide were overweight, of whom 890 million were living with obesity. For children and adolescents aged 5–19 years, over 390 million were overweight, including 160 million who were obese. Furthermore, an estimated 35 million children under

the age of 5 years were overweight including obesity in 2024<sup>1</sup>. To tackle the obesity epidemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) calls upon Member States to accelerate actions and stop the rise in obesity<sup>2</sup>. Like in other parts of the world, overweight and obesity represent a significant public health challenge in Hong Kong.

## Prevalence of Overweight and Obesity in Hong Kong



Children aged 4<sup>3</sup>:  
about **3 in 100**



Primary school  
students<sup>4</sup>:  
about **1 in 6**



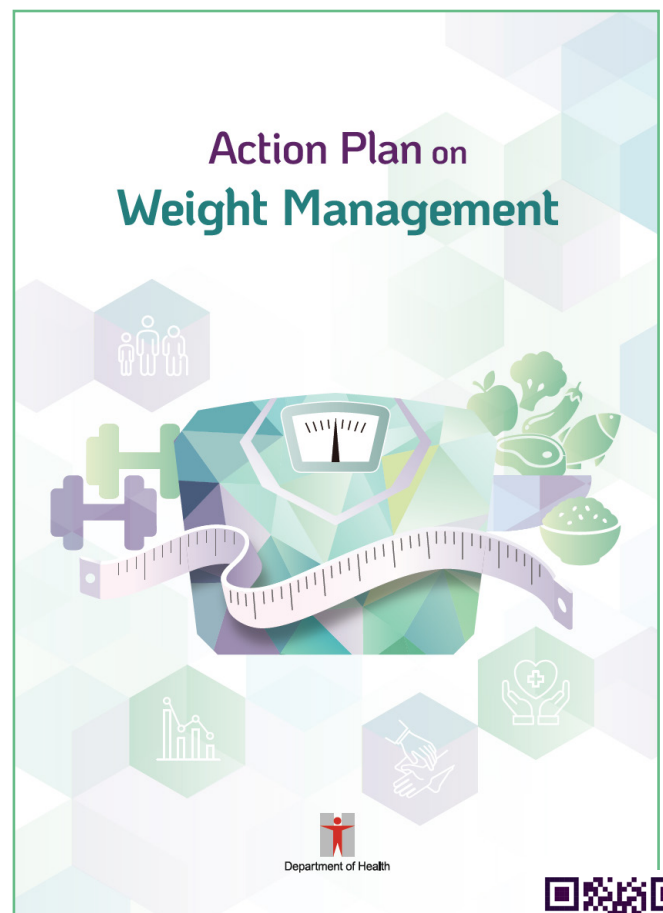
Secondary school  
students<sup>4</sup>:  
**1 in 6**



Adults aged 18 years  
or above<sup>5</sup>:  
more than **1 in 2**

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Government) attaches great importance to the prevention and control of obesity<sup>6</sup>. The Chief Executive further announced in his 2025 Policy Address that the Government would make reference to the national and the WHO policy frameworks to raise public awareness of weight management, including strengthening health education and promotion, cultivating a supportive environment for weight management, strengthening health service delivery, adopting a life-course approach health promotion strategy, and continuously monitoring the weight trends<sup>7</sup>. In March 2026, the Government launched Hong Kong's inaugural Action Plan on Weight Management (Action Plan)<sup>8</sup>. The Action Plan will be implemented over three years, with each year focusing on a distinct theme: Raise Awareness, Positive Changes, and Maintenance.

To empower members of the public to take charge of their own weight and prevent obesity and related adverse health consequences, this article gives a brief account of the importance of weight management across the life-course, common anthropometric measurements and indicators of weight status, as well as the roles of diet and physical activity in weight management.



For more information,  
please refer to Action Plan  
on Weight Management



# Weight Management – Key Insights for ALL

**Understanding the underlying principles of weight management is essential, whether the objective is weight reduction or weight maintenance.**

Other than genetic influences, medication use and certain diseases (such as thyroid diseases and Cushing 's syndrome), the fundamental cause of obesity is more calories are taken up than expended over time<sup>1</sup>. Weight management primarily involves maintaining energy balance through a combination of healthy eating and regular physical activity. It is further supported by other healthy lifestyle habits that play a role in weight control such as getting

sufficient sleep, refraining from alcohol consumption and reducing stress. For those who are overweight or obese, managing weight is vital to lowering the risk of chronic diseases. Being underweight also carries risks, including weakened immunity, hormonal issues, fertility problems, osteoporosis and related fractures. At all ages, maintaining an optimal weight is essential for overall health.

## From Growing Up to Growing Old, Healthy Weight Matters

<b>Childhood</b>	Early weight issues can negatively impact physical growth, mental health, and social development. Obese children are at increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, with studies showing that about three-quarters of children with type 2 diabetes are also obese <sup>9</sup> . Childhood obesity is also linked to a higher likelihood of experiencing low self-esteem and being bullied <sup>10</sup> . These negative health effects often persist into adulthood.
<b>Adolescence</b>	Poor weight management can disrupt puberty and growth patterns. Increased body fatness is linked to a higher risk of metabolic disorders and other obesity-related complications. Research shows that about 20–30% of obese adolescents develop metabolic syndrome <sup>11</sup> . Abnormal weight, whether overweight or underweight, can also contribute to various mental health challenges related to body image, including low self-confidence and depression <sup>10</sup> . Being underweight during adolescence can also affect immunity and increase the risk of chronic diseases, such as anaemia-related complications and osteoporosis in adulthood.
<b>Adulthood</b>	The risk of overweight and obesity increases with age due to slower metabolism, hormonal changes and the cumulative effects of unhealthy lifestyles. Most chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and certain cancers usually begin to emerge in adulthood, making weight maintenance a key factor in prevention.
<b>Older adulthood</b>	Weight management is a cornerstone of healthy ageing. Maintaining a healthy weight helps protect against frailty, reduces the risk of age-related health problems, preserves mobility and enhances quality of life. While obesity increases the risk of joint problems and other chronic conditions, being underweight can lead to muscle loss and a higher risk of falls.

## Measurement and Classification of Weight Status

**One important aspect of weight management is to recognise what constitutes a healthy or suboptimal weight status for an individual's age, sex and ethnic background. Effective weight management also hinges on being aware of one's weight status.**

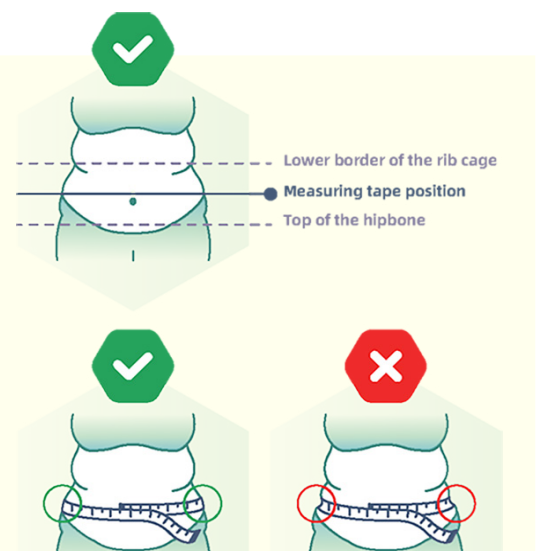
There are many methods to assess weight status and body fat distribution, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of overall adiposity that classifies weight status as wasted, underweight, normal weight, overweight, or obese. It can be applied to both children and adults. However, BMI cannot reflect body fat distribution.

$$\text{BMI (body mass index)} = \frac{\text{weight (kg)}}{\text{height (m)} \times \text{height (m)}}$$

Waist circumference is a commonly used anthropometric index that reflects central obesity, i.e., the excessive accumulation of fat in the abdominal area. Although waist circumference appears easy to measure, variations in measurement can be induced by site of measurement, standing posture or respiratory phase. Measurement error would also occur if the tape is pulled too tight or too loose. Take measurements precisely to guarantee reliable results.

### How to measure waist circumference

- Remove items placed around abdominal area.
- Breathe out normally, wrap a measuring tape around the waist.
- Measure halfway between your lowest rib and the top of your hipbone, roughly in the line with your belly button.
- Make sure the tap is snug, without compressing the skin.



# BMI Cut-off Points for Children and Adolescents

With funding from the Health Bureau's Health and Medical Research Fund, the Department of Health (DH), the Department of Paediatrics of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and the Department of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine of the University of Hong Kong jointly conducted the Hong Kong Growth Study 2020<sup>12</sup>. Based on the data collected in the growth survey and advice from local and overseas experts, growth charts have been updated for monitoring the growth of children and adolescents aged 0–18, including weight-for-age, length/height-for-age, BMI-for-age and head circumference-for-age<sup>13</sup>.

Since children and adolescents are still growing, different BMI cut-offs are applied for different age groups. BMI-for-age centiles are used to indicate how their BMI measurements compare to other children and adolescents of the same sex and age group.

Parents and carers can use a BMI chart to see how their children's weight status compares to others of the same sex and age. To identify whether infants and young children are overweight or obese, however, assessment should be conducted by healthcare professionals who can then provide appropriate health advice and follow-up.

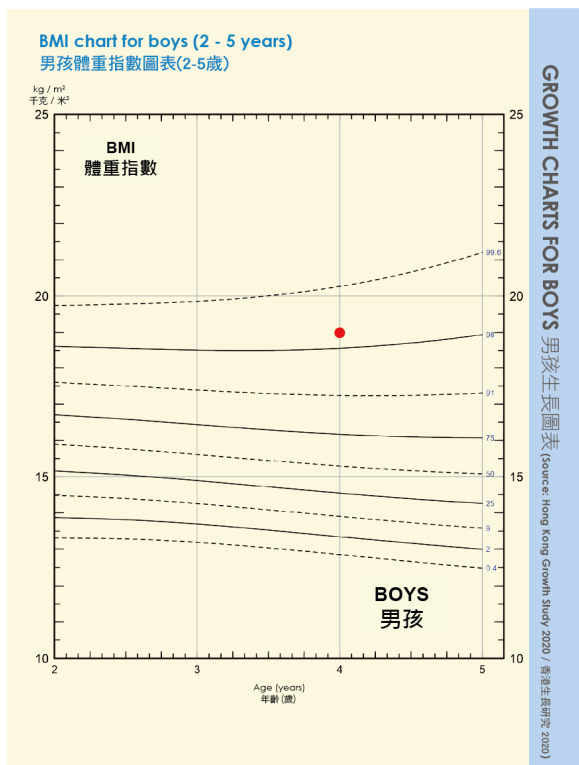


For more information, please visit "Growth Chart" on the website of the Department of Health

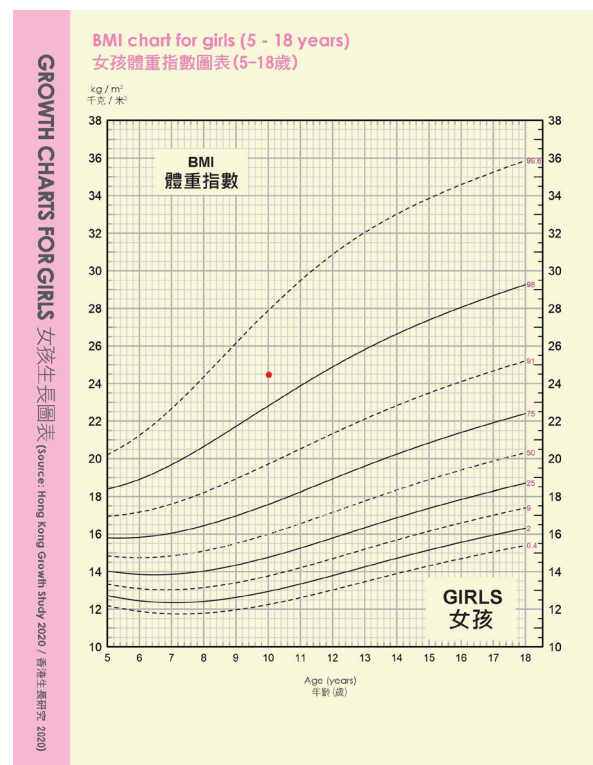
## Classification of weight status among children and adolescents in Hong Kong based on BMI-for-age centiles for the same sex and age group<sup>13</sup>

- > 99.6<sup>th</sup> centile **Obese**
- > 98<sup>th</sup>-99.6<sup>th</sup> centile **Overweight**
- < 2<sup>nd</sup> centile **Wasted**

- > 98<sup>th</sup> centile **Obese**
- > 91<sup>st</sup>-98<sup>th</sup> centile **Overweight**
- 2<sup>nd</sup>-91<sup>st</sup> centile **Normal**
- 0.4<sup>th</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centile **Underweight**
- < 0.4<sup>th</sup> centile **Wasted**



**Example:** A 4-year-old boy who is 1.1 m tall and weighs 23 kg has a **BMI of 19.0**. According to the Hong Kong 2020, the boy's BMI is between the 98.0<sup>th</sup> and 99.6<sup>th</sup> percentile of the same sex and age group and therefore is **overweight**.

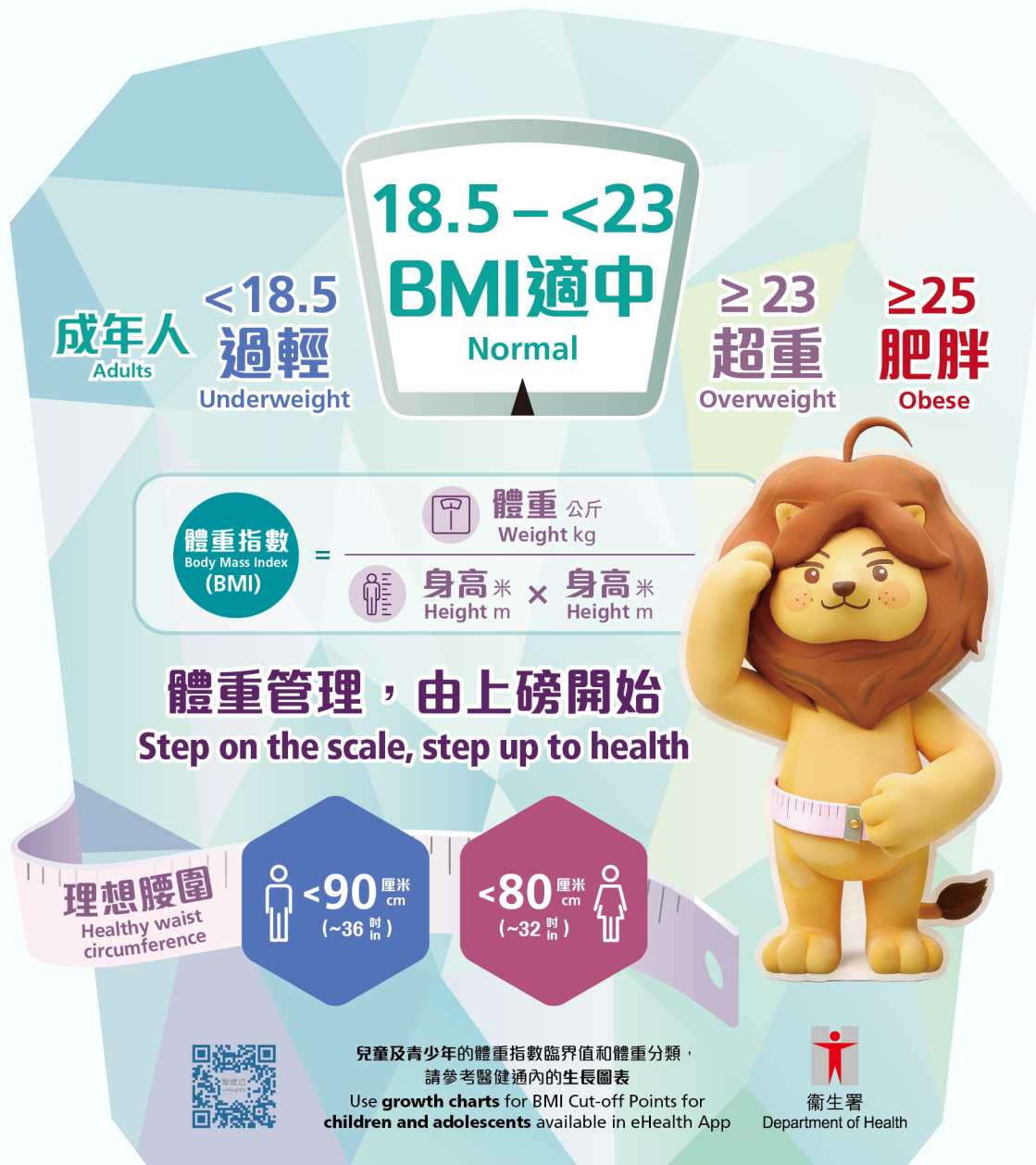


**Example:** A 10-year-old girl who is 1.4 m tall and weighs 48 kg has a **BMI of 24.5**. According to the Hong Kong 2020, the girl's BMI is above the 98.0<sup>th</sup> percentile of the same sex and age group and therefore is **obese**.

# BMI and Waist Circumference Cut-off Points for Adults

For adults, BMI cut-offs do not differ by sex and age but vary across ethnic groups. Asian adults generally exhibit higher body fat percentages and greater cardiometabolic risks at the same BMI compared with Caucasians of the same age. For Chinese adults in Hong Kong, therefore, lower BMI and waist circumference cut-off points are recommended for weight classification<sup>14-16</sup>.

Classification of weight status for Chinese adults in Hong Kong by BMI values<sup>15, 16</sup>



For example, a woman who is 1.6 m tall and weighs 62 kg has a BMI of 24.2. According to the BMI classification for Chinese adults in Hong Kong, she is regarded as overweight. Similarly, a man who is 1.78 m tall and weighs 90 kg has a BMI of 28.4 is regarded as obese.

Members of the public can assess their weight status by using the online BMI calculator.



BMI  
calculator.

# Eat Smart for Weight Control—Watch Portions and Calories

Nutritional needs vary across life stages. Six months of breastfeeding helps protect infants against obesity<sup>17, 18</sup>. For children, adolescents and adults, a balanced diet, regular meals, and proper portions are key to weight management<sup>19</sup>. Alcohol is highly calorific and can increase drinkers' daily energy intake by 5–10%<sup>20</sup>. Apart from adding extra calories to daily diets, alcohol inhibits the breakdown and usage of fats as energy and favours fat accumulation in the liver and abdominal area<sup>21</sup>. Non-drinkers should not start, while drinkers are encouraged to refrain or quit drinking, and consider the health benefits of quitting.

Of note, eating well to control weight is not only about what to eat, but also about when and how to eat. The basic principles include: replacing high-calorie foods with low-calorie alternatives; avoiding excessive calorie intake from beverages; maintaining regular meals; watching portion sizes; eating slowly (as the brain usually takes about 20 minutes or more to start perceiving stomach distension and cause changes in the level of appetite-related hormones) and stopping eating once feeling full.

## Key eating and drinking tips for weight management across different age groups

### Infants and young children 0–24 months old<sup>22, 23</sup>



- Breastfeed exclusively for 6 months; continue up to 2 years or longer
- Start solid foods around 6 months to meet nutrition needs
- Practise responsive feeding: follow hunger cues, stop at fullness, avoid force-feeding
- Offer variety; limit processed foods, juice, and added sugar
- Avoid using snacks for comfort

### Young children aged 3–4 years old<sup>22, 23</sup>



- Build healthy eating habits
- Provide 3 meals and 2 snacks daily
- Serve balanced meals with fruits & vegetables
- Limit sugary, fatty and processed foods
- Avoid sugary drinks—water is a healthy option



### Children and adolescents<sup>24, 25</sup>



- Eat a balanced diet with fruits and vegetables; limit processed foods
- Have breakfast, lunch and dinner regularly; don't skip or overeat
- Pack healthy school lunches: "3 lows, 1 high" (low fat, sugar, salt; high fiber) with grains, vegetables, and protein in 3:2:1 ratio
- Choose lower energy snacks, such as fruits, cherry tomatoes, boiled corn or dry-roasted nuts

### Adults<sup>26</sup>



- Eat a balanced diet with at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables; choose whole grains and cut back on fat, salt and sugar
- Use low-fat cooking methods: steaming, stewing, braising, blanching, roasting and baking
- Choose "EatSmart Restaurants" and "EatSmart Dishes" —"More Fruit and Vegetables"; "3 Less" (less fat or oil, salt and sugar) dishes
- Refrain from alcohol drinking

# Get Active for Weight Control—Every Movement Counts

Physical activity not only burns body fat, but also builds muscle and boosts metabolism, acting as both a key to long-term weight maintenance and a healthy way for weight loss. Thus, everyone should make physical activity a "must do" habit and limit the time spent being sedentary. Physical activity recommendations vary by age and population group, reflecting different health needs and abilities<sup>27, 28</sup>. While children and adolescents engage in physical activities that support growth, adults are

encouraged to exercise regularly to maintain fitness and prevent disease. Elders require multicomponent physical activity to help reduce the risk of falls. Following tailored physical activity guidelines ensures safe and effective health benefits for all. For details about physical activity recommendations throughout the life course with tips about incorporating more physical activity into daily living, please refer to the February 2026 issue of NCD Watch "7.5 Million Reasons to Get Moving".

## Recommended Amounts of Aerobic Physical Activity for Children, Adolescents, and Adults

### Young Children



### Children and Adolescents



### Adults



For more information: NCD Watch "7.5 Million Reasons to Get Moving"

# Achieving Weight Control with Science-Based Strategies

A study of 23 149 participants showed that midlife weight loss from overweight or obesity to healthy weight without surgery or medication, reduced chronic disease risk by 48% and all cause mortality by 19%<sup>29</sup>. Even among individuals who were overweight before midlife, achieving and sustaining a healthy weight also leads to better health outcomes<sup>30</sup>.

To lose weight, individuals must either cut down calories consumed, burn more calories through increased physical activity, or both. A modest 5–10% weight loss in people who are overweight or obese can bring substantial health benefits, including improving blood glucose, blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels<sup>31,32</sup>. As a rule, it is recommended to lose weight gradually at a rate of about 0.5–1.0 kg per week<sup>33</sup>. Reducing weight too quickly can cause physiological strain and increases the risk of weight regain.

During the weight loss process, it is common to experience a plateau due to the body's multiple defense mechanisms, such as metabolic adaptation, hormonal regulation and muscle loss. To overcome this plateau, the key lies in making strategic changes to restart the weight loss progress, such as adjusting diet, increasing physical activity, managing stress and ensuring adequate sleep. Having an achievable plan with realistic goals can make weight management more effective.

Studies also show regular weighing helps prevent weight gain and promotes weight loss, especially when combined with healthy lifestyle changes. Frequency usually depends on personal goals and preferences: for active weight loss, daily or weekly weighing offers quick feedback and reinforces healthy habits; for maintenance, weekly or monthly weighing is usually enough to track progress and avoid unwanted gain<sup>34,35</sup>.

Remember, weight management is not a short-term action, but a lifelong health strategy. There is no 'magic bullet' or 'quick fix solution' for losing weight. Never buy weight-loss medications without a prescription. Before starting any drug treatment, medical advice must be sought. The key to success is through changes in eating and physical activity habits for the long haul. If indicated, talk to family doctor, physiotherapist or dietitian for a customised weight management plan. Members of the public can also register as members of District Health Centre through the "eHealth" mobile application, and access professional counselling, health risk assessments as well as weight management support. For details, please visit the District Health Centre website. ([www.dhc.gov.hk/en/index.html](http://www.dhc.gov.hk/en/index.html))



## Eat Smart



## Be Physically Active



## Get Help



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# Hong Kong's inaugural Action Plan on Weight Management launched to build healthy and vibrant city

In response to the national Weight Management Year initiative and the WHO Acceleration Plan to Stop Obesity global framework, the Government launched Hong Kong's inaugural Action Plan on Weight Management (Action Plan) on 4 March 2026. The Action Plan is based on scientific evidence, building a systematic strategy that spans the entire life cycle and covers the entire social environment. From prenatal nutrition, habit formation during school years, and health management for working adults



Photo shows the Controller of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, Dr Edwin Tsui (second left); Head, Non-Communicable Disease Branch of the Centre for Health Protection, Dr Anne Chee (second right); the Principal Education Officer (School Governance and Efficiency) of the Education Bureau, Mr Tang Kai Chak (first left); and the Chief Leisure Manager (Community Sports) of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (first right) with the Action Plan on Weight Management

to maintaining physical function in the elderly, it provides appropriate support at every key stage of life.

The Action Plan will follow 5 Key Directions, driving 15 Objectives to comprehensively driving weight management across Hong Kong through different activities and approaches and pooling the strengths of various government bureaux and departments to comprehensively drive weight management across Hong Kong. To this end, the Government has established an interdepartmental Weight Management Working Group to co-ordinate policies in healthcare, education, recreation and culture, urban planning, and other areas, promoting multisectoral efforts across government, industry, academia, and the community.



衛生署  
Department of Health

日行萬步  
10,000 Steps

於「e+生活」平台  
點擊「日行萬步」  
Click "Walking Challenge"  
in e+Life App

同步  
每天步數  
Synchronise  
Daily Steps

賺積分  
換禮品  
Earn Coins  
Redeem Gifts

10,000 Steps a Day Walking Challenge

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WIN HEALTH & EARN COINS

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On 21 March, the Department of Health also held a launching ceremony and carnival for the "Action Plan on Weight Management X 10 000 Steps a Day Walking Challenge" at the West Kowloon Cultural District to encourage members of the public to pay attention to their health, integrate physical activity into their daily life by walking 10 000 steps a day and manage their weight persistently. Starting this year, the walking challenge will be regularised as a year-round initiative, motivating members of the public to integrate physical activity into their daily life by walking 10 000 steps a day.



Photo shows the Acting Secretary for Health, Dr Cecilia Fan (front row, centre); the Director of Health, Dr Ronald Lam (front row, fifth left); the Controller of the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, Dr Edwin Tsui (front row, fifth right); and other officiating guests at the kick-off ceremony of "10 000 steps a day" walking challenge.

Participants can download and log in to the "e+Life" App, synchronise their mobile device's step count with the app, complete various missions, and earn Health Coins to redeem prizes. "e+Life" App also features various thematic walking routes, as well as functions displaying personal records and friends' step counts, allowing the public to remind and encourage each other, making exercise an enjoyable activity.



Download "e+Life" App

The DH urges the public to support the Action Plan, starting with being aware of their own weight indicators and actively participating in physical activity. For more information on the walking challenge and weight management, please visit the Change for Health website of the Department of Health at [www.change4health.gov.hk](http://www.change4health.gov.hk).

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