

# [***Why Are People Fighting Over BMI? Conservatives Call Doctors Group Woke For Questioning Obesity Measure***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:68HN-R2P1-JBCM-F0M6-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 1056 words

**Byline:** Conor Murray, Forbes Staff

**Highlight:** The AMA urged doctors last week to consider more health factors than just body mass index alone.

**Body**

**Topline**

Right-wing pundits criticized the American Medical Association as woke, the latest target in an ongoing culture war, for a new policy urging doctors to consider more health factors than just body mass index (BMI), a weight measurement sometimes controversial because of its history of racist exclusion.

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The AMA urged doctors to consider more health factors than just body mass index. (Photo by Frank Molter/picture alliance via Getty Images)

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**Key Facts**

BMI determined by taking a person s weight and then dividing it by the square of the person s height is used in clinical settings to diagnose obesity and assess risk for health issues associated with obesity.

On the BMIscale, a normal weight is between 18.5 and 24.9, a score under 18.5 is considered underweight, between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight, and 30 or greater is considered obese.

The American Medical Associationadopteda new policy last week acknowledging the limitations of body mass index because of its use for racist exclusion it was developed using data collected primarily from white male populations suggesting BMI be considered alongside other clinical measures of risk instead of by itself.

The AMA policy states BMI strongly correlates with fat mass in the general public but loses predictability on an individual level, and other factors like sex, gender, race, ethnicity and age can influence body shape and composition.

The policy urges medical providers to consider BMI in conjunction with other measures, including measurements of visceral fat, body adiposity index, body composition, relative fat mass, waist circumference and genetic/metabolic factors.

The AMA policy comes after years ofresearchidentifying thelimitationsof BMI andcriticismof the index from some medical providers and activists who argue an emphasis on BMI can contribute to weightstigmaand is based on datacollectedprimarily from white men.

Some right-wing pundits and social media users, including Ben Shapiro, ridiculed the policy and have considered the AMA s acknowledgement of its history of racist exclusion to be woke.

**Chief Critics**

In avideotitled, BMI Is Now Cancelled?! Shapiro ridiculed the AMA as no longer particularly interested in medicine and defended BMI as an accepted measure of weight. He stated: It seems to me that much of what is driving the AMA these days is an attempt to get in good with the woke crowd, pointing to the AMA s defense of gender-affirming care as a woke policy, though the AMAstatesits support of gender-affirming care is backed by research that links treatment to lower suicidal ideation in transgender individuals. Fox News host Jeanine Pirro and NYU professor of medicine and Fox News contributor Mark Siegel similarly ridiculed the AMA s policy in asegmentTuesday. I didn t believe that the AMA was going to get involved in cancel culture, Siegel said, who defended BMI as a starting point for treating overweight patients. In atweetto his more than 1.3 million followers, right-wing YouTuber Paul Joseph Watson seemingly mocked body positivity people who would rejoice at the new AMA policy.

**Key Background**

The body mass index measurement was developed by Belgian mathematician and statistician Lambert Adolphe Jacques Quetelet beginning in the 1830s. He did notintendfor BMI to diagnose obesity but rather to measure the average man. Originally called the Quetelet Index, Quetelet conducted and published research on height and weight, first in newborns and children and then in adults. His pursuit to measure the average man was key for the development ofeugenics. The term body mass index was latercoinedand popularized by physiologist Ancel Keys in 1972. The Keys studysurveyedmore than 7,000 healthy, mostly middle-aged men, and Keys and his colleagues found the index a suitable measure of weight in populations. BMI has beenadoptedby organizations like the World Health Organization and the National Institutes of Health to measure obesity, and BMI haspersistedas an attractive option for doctors to measure a patient s weight because it is simple and inexpensive.

**Contra**

But BMI has long been the target of criticism from some health providers and activists, particularly over its use to evaluate an individual s health instead of a population. BMI is unable to distinguish body fat from muscle so a person who has large muscle mass but low body fat may register as overweight on the BMI scale. Research indicates body compositions can vary across races and ethnicities, whichsome saymakes BMI problematic as it is used to determine eligibility for some medications and surgeries. Some alsoarguethe emphasis on BMI can contribute to stigma against overweight patients, whichstudieshave shown is prevalent among doctors.

**Crucial Quote**

Dr. Yoni Freedhoff, an associate professor of family medicine at the University of Ottawa,told**The New York Times** BMI is fairly useless when looking at the individual. If a doctor assumes a patient with a normal BMI is healthy, this can cause doctors to overlook other health problems or poor dietary habits, Freedhoff said. Similarly, focusing on just the weight of a patient with an overweight BMI may cause a doctor to stigmatize the patient and overlook more important diagnoses.

**Tangent**

Woke has become afrequent insultused against companies and organizations by right-wing pundits and social media users for socially conscious behavior like supporting Pride month or committing to diversity, equity and inclusion. Bud Light infamously faced a boycott in April after it sent transgender TikTok star Dylan Mulvaney a customized can with her face on it, leading to a dip in sales for the company and sparking a wave of boycotts and online protests against other companies deemed woke. Though woke is now frequently used as a political buzzword, its original meaning in African American communities was to stay aware of social and racial injustice.

**Further Reading**

Garth Brooks, Cracker Barrel Are The Latest Targets Of LGBTQ Culture Wars: Here Are All The Others From Bud Light To Target(Forbes)

What Does Woke Even Mean? How A Decades-Old Racial Justice Term Became Co-Opted By ***Politics***(Forbes)

Why BMI is a flawed health standard, especially for people of color(New York Times)

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