



WEIGHING IN
THE LATEST DEBATE OVER MODELS AND MEASUREMENTS RAISES THE
QUESTION, WHAT SIZE IS BEAUTY?

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In the wake of the BMI brouhaha that erupted on and off runways this fall—starting with Madrid's ban on ultraskinny models and culminating in Jean Paul Gaultier's plus-size act of defiance—fashion insiders are left wondering how the great weight debate will affect the shape of things to come. Will last season's waifs be pushed off the catwalk by bigger beauties like Velvet d'Amour, the larger-than-life model Gaultier sent down the Parisian runway? Slim chance. "Thin is what photographers and designers are looking for," admits Cathy Gould, director of New York's Elite modeling agency. "The Cindy Crawford types are beautiful and sexy, but that's not in fashion now."

Backstage, the questions rage on: Can monitoring BMI (body-mass index) uncover an eating disorder, and what is BMI anyway? "The BMI is a really good indicator of someone being at an unhealthily low weight," says Kelly Brownell, Ph.D., director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at Yale University. The formula—weight (in pounds) divided by height (in inches) squared, times 703—is a reliable way of estimating body fat, which "is more relevant to health than body weight," Brownell says. For instance, very low body fat can cause amenorrhea (the cessation of menstruation), which can increase the risk of heart disease, osteoporosis, and diminished fertility. Some argue that naturally thin models are being unfairly labeled as sick based on their low BMIs. "It's possible that some models are just genetically that way," says Brownell. "But once BMI falls below 16, you're probably beyond biology and to the point where someone is engaging in unhealthy behaviors." For a five-foot-eleven woman, that means weighing less than 115 pounds (she would need to weigh 133 pounds to move her BMI into the "normal" range: between 18.5 and 24.9). Fashion is already ahead of the curve: Spring's silhouettes celebrate volume.

To calculate your BMI, go to nhlbisupport.com/bmi.

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