

# SCIENCE NEWS®

The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science

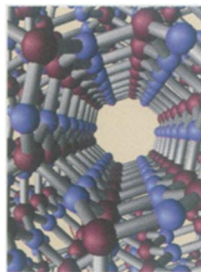
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**Cover:** In computer models, carbon (red) and nitrogen (blue) atoms easily bond to form  $\beta$ - $C_3N_4$ , a material predicted to rival the hardness of diamond. In real life, however, this superhard material has been super hard to make—prompting scientists to wonder whether it can exist at all. **Page 28** (Image: Michel Côté, U.C. Berkeley)

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## Letters

### Furthering the fat fracas

I am a 50-year-old male. I am 6'4", 220 pounds, and an unhealthy 27 on your body mass index ("The Fat Fracas," SN: 5/2/98, p. 283). I am also a professional ski instructor during the winter, a serious rock climber, backpacker, scuba diver, runner, and workout not-quite-fanatic. My blood pressure is average, I have 10% body fat, and my cholesterol is slightly above the midrange of normal. Yet according to the medical profession, I am ready to kick? I don't think so.

Obesity is a serious problem. Spending most of my life in a national park, I see obese people and the problems they face on a daily basis. However, not everyone with a high body mass is fat or unhealthy!

*Jerry Anderson*  
Yosemite National Park, Calif.

*Editor's Note: People with a muscular body type may appear to be overweight or even obese on the standard body-mass index chart. Indeed, many professional athletes are classified as too fat using the standard chart.*

—K. Fackelmann

**The body-mass-index** table illustrates one reason weight guidelines get ignored: Although the article indicates ratios of 19 to 25 as ideal, the table shows all values up to 25 as green (good). How credible is a table that puts a 6'2" man weighing 105 lbs. in the green zone?

The body-mass index is also overly simplistic in connecting weight (a volume-related measure) to height (a linear measure), thus demanding that taller people be proportionally much thinner. Although a realistic relationship wouldn't be cubic (taller people aren't scaled up equally in all dimensions), it would certainly be more than linear.

*Dick Dunn*  
Hygiene, Colo.

**In the informative** article summarizing different points of view about body weight and health, the picture accompanying the sidebar was in direct conflict with the message of the article. Why feature a pencil-thin woman? This picture only reinforces that which scientists are trying to prevent, as

described in this article: "The desire to be as thin as a fashion model has triggered an epidemic of life-threatening eating disorders."

*Mary Beth Petersen*  
Brookfield, Wis.

**The article on fat** said "... women who had gained 22 pounds or more since age 18 ran an increased risk of dying."

No, their risk of dying is still 100%. What is needed is time-related information, such as the disease incidence by age 40 and by age 50, so we can judge the impact on lifespan and quality of life. Otherwise, we get a vague message and end up fighting windmills.

*Richard C. Hertzberg*  
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