

Should You Weigh Yourself Daily? Considering Both Sides of the Scale

Studies on whether to weigh yourself daily or not come down for and against.



Here it comes, the dreaded scale discussion. And, believe it or not, it's not going to be that bad. To start, scales are not meant, in any way, to be scary or to haunt you. Nor should they rule your life or make you feel bad about yourself. But, they can offer an approximate measurement of your body mass. And given there are two sides to the scale, we will take a scientific look at both. We'll guide you in deciding whether or not daily weight tracking will help or hinder your health goals.

Side A: Helpful for Weight Loss

A new study suggests that daily weigh-ins paired with weight-loss support education may be key to “an improved adoption of weight control behaviors” that help to sustain long-term weight-loss goals (1). The study evaluated weight-loss success in 47 overweight men and women randomized to either daily weigh-ins paired with weight-loss reinforcement lessons or randomized to unstructured weigh-ins without weight-loss education. Over a period of six months, those weighing in daily who were reinforced with weight-loss education lost 13 to 14 pounds, which was seven pounds more than the individuals who were not required to weigh in daily. Not only did the daily weight trackers lose more weight, but they also adopted 17 meaningful weight loss behaviors and stuck with them (1).

And in a similar study, researchers observed the behaviors of 40 overweight individuals seeking to lose weight. They also compared the continuity of daily weigh-ins to weight lost and gained. It was found that those individuals weighing in daily lost more weight. And those individuals not weighing in for more than one week's time actually gained weight (2). So here you have it, the scale can be a helpful tool and for some, daily weight tracking paired with other healthy behaviors supported weight loss. But, this might not be true for you. That is why we must consider side B of the scale.

Side B: Harmful for Health

In a recently published issue of the *Journal of The American College of Nutrition*, researchers questioned the issue of being weighed and subsequent eating behaviors. They weighed a group of people before administering a dietary questionnaire and weighed a different group after they completed the same questionnaire. It turns out that those who were weighed before answering diet-related questions exhibited a greater desire for dietary restraint than those answering the questions without an idea of current weight. These results, although allowing for wide interpretation, do prove that body weight tracking does promote

awareness leading to a greater degree of dietary restraint (3). For some, a certain amount of dietary restraint is useful in reaching specific health goals, while for others, dietary restraint can lead to disordered dietary habits and to other body image related diseases.

Nationally, 24 million people suffer from an eating disorder and experience the highest rates of death among the spectrum of mental illness (4). And, sadly, this alarming statistic does not include individuals struggling with body dysmorphia disorder who are reported to have a suicide rate 45 times higher than average (5). The scale unfortunately plays a role in these diseases, as chronic weight checking is a telling clue medical professionals use to help identify and diagnose these disorders. The question “do you weigh in daily?” and other questions related to obsessive weight tracking are listed on disordered eating and disordered body image perception questionnaires (6).

Although losing weight to improve health might be necessary for some, others can become unhealthily preoccupied by it. The number on the scale can also translate unhealthily and trickle down to how many bites of food or laps around the block are allowed or required. These are only some examples of scale-driven preoccupations that harm both men and women (5).

Striking Balance

Based on current scientific literature, the question of daily weigh-ins remains conflicted. On one side, proving very helpful for weight loss and, on the other side, posing great risks to certain individuals resulting in severe negative psychological consequences (7). So now it is your turn to question your own weight-loss motivations and to purposefully decide whether or not daily weigh-ins are really a good weight-loss tool for *you*. Stay healthy!

References:

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