

Use multiple measurements to track weight loss

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Six weeks into 2012, those who made New Year's resolutions to lose weight or get into better shape have either started to see some progress, or for others, fallen off track.

It can be difficult to maintain a new fitness routine or diet, but UC's Dan Carl, PhD, says tracking specific data can help people get a basic idea of their body composition—and may provide encouragement to stay with a routine over time.

Carl, an assistant professor of clinical rehabilitative sciences at UC's College of Allied Health Sciences, recommends keeping track of several body measurements to get a complete picture of your [weight](#) loss.

"The standard fitness measurements should include height, weight, body fat percentage and body mass index (BMI)," he says.

Focusing on just one measurement like weight or BMI can be misleading, says Carl, "but monitoring all the measurements gives a true indication of where you're at."

Body fat percentage can be measured with some high-tech scales, skin fold calipers or a simple tape measure, while BMI calculators are available online.

Though BMI can't tell how much of a person's weight is fat and how much is muscle, it can serve as a fairly reliable indicator for most people

over time. According to the CDC, a BMI between 18.5 to 24.9 is considered normal, while a BMI 25-29.9 is considered overweight. The BMI ranges for adults are the same for both men and women.

Body fat percentage is especially clarifying, says Carl, as it goes beyond the surface. While a large, athletic man could be listed as overweight or obese by BMI charts, he may have a low body fat percentage. Similarly, a woman who looks thin but never exercises may store her extra weight as fat.

Average [body fat](#) percentage for men is between 13-17 percent and between 20-27 percent for women. High is classified as 17-25 percent for men and 27-31 percent for women.

While exact measurements can be taken by doctors, personal trainers or at sports performance labs, careful work with a tape measure at home can be just as helpful when documented regularly.

"My best advice for the person beginning a fitness routine would be to write it down," says Carl. "Keep a log of your diet and fitness numbers—you'll start to see patterns and it can help you attach yourself to the routine. That will help with keeping to your new diet and goals in those first few weeks."

Carl also recommends some perspective—saying those starting or trying to maintain a new fitness regimen should commit themselves to "the long haul."

"People can put on 20 pounds in 20 years, but who looks at losing that weight over 20 years? If you think about making minor changes to your lifestyle and think long-term about taking off the weight, you're more likely to be successful," he says. "Don't be fooled by what you see in two to three weeks—take a year or two to lose significant weight."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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