

Self-weighing may be a hazardous behavior among young women

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This is an image of a weight scale. Credit: CDC/Debora Cartagena

Self-weighing can be a useful tool to help adults control their weight, but for adolescents and young adults this behavior may have negative psychological outcomes. Researchers from the University of Minnesota tracked the self-weighing behaviors of more than 1,900 young adults as part of Project EAT (Eating and Activity in Teens and Young Adults) and found increases in self-weighing to be significantly related to

increases in weight concern and depression and decreases in body satisfaction and self-esteem among females.

"Females who strongly agreed they self-weighed reported engaging in extremely dangerous weight-control behaviors at a rate of 80%," Carly R. Pacanowski, PhD, RD, lead author of the study, said. "Adolescent obesity is a public health concern, but body dissatisfaction and weight concerns are predictors of eating disorders. This makes it critical that obesity-prevention programs avoid exacerbating these predictors by understanding how behaviors such as self-weighing affect teens."

Project EAT is a longitudinal cohort study that tracked 1,902 [young adults](#) (43% male, 57% female) over 10 years. Researchers used participants' descriptions of the prevalence of their self-weighing from the study to examine associations between self-weighing and changes in weight status, psychological variables, and behavioral outcomes. Self-weighing, ideal weight, weight concern, [body satisfaction](#), [self-esteem](#), and depressive symptoms were ranked by participants using a Likert scale; [adolescents](#) also reported their engagement in unhealthy and extreme unhealthy behaviors. Researchers calculated BMI for the participants as well.

The researchers' primary interest in this investigation was to understand how changes in self-weighing were related to changes in the other variables studied. Results indicated that [females](#) who reported increases in self-weighing over the 10-year period were expected to have increases in weight concern and depressive symptoms and decreases in body satisfaction and self-esteem. As such, self-weighing may not be an innocuous behavior and care should be taken when young adults report self-weighing.

"Clinicians should ask adolescent patients about self-weighing at office visits to determine any benefits or negative outcomes," Pacanowski

added. "Noting changes in this behavior over time can be helpful for investigating other, more concerning changes in well-being among young adults."

More information: 'Self-Weighing Throughout Adolescence and Young Adulthood: Implications for Well-Being,' by Carly R. Pacanowski, PhD, RD; Katie A. Loth, PhD, RD; Peter J. Hannan, MStat; Jennifer A. Linde, PhD; Dianne R. Neumark-Sztainer, PhD, MPH, RD (DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2015.08.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2015.08.008)), *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Volume 47/Issue 6. Nov./Dec. 2015.

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