

The pros and cons of weighing yourself every day

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This is the year you've vowed to lose weight. You step on the scale to

mark the starting point toward your goal.

Now how often should you hop back on to check your progress?

The answer isn't always so simple. Perhaps every day, perhaps every week, with the qualifier that the scale isn't the only way to gauge whether you're headed in the right direction.

"Our philosophy here is that no one size fits all," said Meridan Zerner, a dietitian, nutritionist and wellness coach at Cooper Clinic in Dallas. "The majority of research would say weigh daily. But if there's any negative fallout from weighing every day in terms of outlook, [self-esteem](#) or your positive momentum, I would say we can check in once or twice a week."

A study presented at the American Heart Association's recent Scientific Sessions conference concluded that daily weigh-ins might be beneficial. Researchers tracked 1,042 adults over a year and found that people who weighed themselves once a week or less did not lose weight, while people who weighed themselves six or seven times a week averaged a 1.7 percent weight loss.

"That's an action we call self-monitoring, which is an evidence-based strategy that we use with all kinds of behavior change," said Amy Walters, a psychologist and director of behavioral services at St. Luke's Health System

Humphreys Diabetes Center in Boise, Idaho. "Tracking your behavior gives people some accountability, it can create some natural feedback, and it can serve as a source of motivation. They see, 'Gosh, if I really follow my plan, I start to see some changes.'"

But there can be drawbacks to spending too much time on that scale.

"You can get obsessive about it," Walters said. "We want to focus on trends and not get hung up on today's number. Weighing daily may be distressing if you don't see the scale change, or have a negative impact on motivation."

Dr. Pamela Peeke, a Maryland-based physician who has written four books on healthy living and weight loss, concurred.

"Keeping tabs on your progress is important to help achieve your weight loss goals," said Peeke, who chairs the Science Advisory Board for the Jenny Craig weight loss centers. However, she added, "If daily weighing causes you more anxiety than motivation, then it's not right for you."

Several factors can affect anxiety and motivation. Different scales can yield different results at different times of day, which is why experts recommend using the same scale at the same time. "First thing in the morning is the best," Zerner said.

Even on the same scale, Walters said, "your weight can fluctuate because of different things: your fluid intake, your hormone levels, your activity level. We don't want to get too hung up on the number."

That number, Zerner said, isn't always a true indication of progress. "If somebody loses a pound of fat and gains a pound of muscle, that's two full pounds of change and that's meaningful," she said.

Nor is the scale the only measure of success.

"How's your energy level?" Walters said. "How are you feeling physically? Are your clothes fitting better? Are you sleeping well? There are other biometrics like blood pressure or blood glucose levels, besides just your [weight](#)."

Zerner advises her clients to also monitor their body fat percentage and waist measurement. Men are advised to have a [waist circumference](#) the distance around the natural waist of less than 40 inches, while women should aim for a waist that measures less than 35 inches.

"(The [scale](#) is) just one of many tools," Zerner said. "But it's giving you feedback, awareness, accountability and just being mindful of how your body is doing."

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