

How often should you really weigh yourself?

July 1 2024, by Nick Fuller



Credit: Ketut Subiyanto from Pexels

Few topics are more debated in health than the value of the humble bathroom scale. Some experts advocate daily self-weigh-ins to promote accountability for weight management, particularly when we're following a diet and exercise program to lose weight.

Others suggest ditching self-weigh-ins altogether, arguing they can trigger negative [psychological responses and unhealthy behaviors](#) when we don't like, or understand, the number we see on the scale.

Many, like me, recommend using scales to weigh yourself weekly, even when we're not trying to lose weight. Here's why.

1. Weighing weekly helps you manage your weight

[Research](#) confirms regular self-weighing is an effective weight loss and management strategy, primarily because it helps increase awareness of our current weight and any changes.

A [systematic review of 12 studies](#) found participants who weighed themselves weekly or daily over several months lost 1–3 BMI ([body mass index](#)) units more and regained less weight than participants who didn't weigh themselves frequently. The weight-loss benefit was evident with weekly weighing; there was no added benefit with daily weighing.

Self-weigh-ins are an essential tool for [weight management](#) as we age. Adults [tend to gain weight](#) progressively [through middle age](#). While the average weight gain is typically between [0.5–1kg per year](#), this modest accumulation of weight can lead to obesity over time. Weekly weighing and keeping track of the results helps avoid unnecessary weight gain.

Tracking our weight can also help identify medical issues early. Dramatic changes in weight can be an early sign of some conditions, including problems with our thyroid, digestion and diabetes.

2. Weekly weighing accounts for normal fluctuations

Our body weight can fluctuate within a single day and across the days of

the week. [Studies](#) show body weight fluctuates by 0.35% within the week and it's typically higher after the weekend.

Daily and day-to-day body weight fluctuations have several causes, many linked to our body's water content. The more common causes include:

The type of food we've consumed

When we've eaten a dinner higher in carbohydrates, we'll weigh more the next day. This change is a result of our bodies temporarily carrying more water. We [retain 3–4 grams of water](#) per gram of carbohydrate consumed to store the energy we take from carbs.

Our water content also increases when we consume [foods higher in salt](#). Our bodies try to maintain a balance of sodium and water. When the concentration of salt in our bloodstream increases, a mechanism is triggered to restore balance by retaining water to dilute the excess salt.

Our food intake

Whether it's 30 grams of nuts or 65 grams of lean meat, everything we eat and drink has weight, which increases our [body weight](#) temporarily while we digest and metabolize what we've consumed.

Our weight also tends to be lower first thing in the morning after our food intake has been restricted overnight and higher in the evening after our daily intake of food and drinks.

Exercise

If we weigh ourselves at the gym after a workout, there's a good chance we'll weigh less due to sweat-induced fluid loss. The amount of water

lost varies depending on things like our workout intensity and duration, the temperature and humidity, along with our sweat rate and hydration level. On average, [we lose 1 liter of sweat](#) during an hour of [moderate-intensity exercise](#).

Hormonal changes

Fluctuations in hormones within your menstrual cycle can also affect fluid balance. Women may experience [fluid retention](#) and temporarily gain 0.5–2kg of weight at this time. Specifically, the luteal phase, which represents the second half of a woman's cycle, results in a shift of fluid from your blood plasma to your cells, and [bloating](#).

Bowel movements

Going to the bathroom can lead to small but immediate weight loss as waste is eliminated from the body. While the amount lost will vary, we generally eliminate [around 100 grams of weight](#) through our daily bowel movements.

All of these fluctuations are normal, and they're not indicative of significant changes in our body fat or muscle mass. However, seeing these fluctuations can lead to unnecessary stress and a fixation with our weight.

3. Weekly weighing avoids scale obsession and weight-loss sabotage

Weighing too frequently can create an obsession with the number on the scales and do more harm than good.

Often, our reaction when we see this number not moving in the direction

we want or expect is to further restrict our food intake or embark on fad dieting. Along with not being enjoyable or sustainable, fad diets also ultimately increase our weight gain rather than reversing it.

This was confirmed in a [long-term study](#) comparing intentional weight loss among more than 4,000 twins. The researchers found the likelihood of becoming overweight by the age of 25 was significantly greater for a twin who dieted to lose 5kg or more. This suggests frequent dieting makes us more susceptible to weight gain and prone to future weight gain.

So what should you do?

Weighing ourselves weekly gives a more accurate measure of our weight trends over time.

Aim to weigh yourself on the same day, at the same time and in the same environment each week—for example, first thing every Friday morning when you're getting ready to take a shower, after you've gone to the bathroom, but before you've drunk or eaten anything.

Use the best quality scales you can afford. Change the batteries regularly and check their accuracy by using a "known" weight—for example, a 10kg weight plate. Place the "known" weight on the scale and check the measurement aligns with the "known" weight.

Remember, the number on the scale is just one part of health and weight management. Focusing solely on it can overshadow other indicators, such as how your clothes fit. It's also essential to pay equal attention to how we're feeling, physically and emotionally.

Stop weighing yourself—at any time interval—if it's triggering anxiety or stress, and get in touch with a health-care professional to discuss this.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: How often should you really weigh yourself? (2024, July 1) retrieved 1 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-07-how-often-should-you-really.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.