

## Weighty Conversations: Don't Measure Your Self-Worth

By Michelle May, M.D.

Do you allow a number on your bathroom scale to make or break your day? Wouldn't it be absurd to let the temperature, the date, or even the Dow-Jones determine how you feel about yourself or how your day will go? They're all just numbers, but for some, weight has the power to change a mood and ruin a morning.



The scale does not measure your self-worth. It simply measures the weight of your tissues (including your bones, muscle and fat) and substances that are just passing through (like water, food, and waste). Your weight can fluctuate dramatically depending on time of day, hormones, when you last ate and other factors—none of which have anything to do with your value as a person.

### Weight a Minute

You probably won't see significant changes in your weight day to day, or even week to week. Further, when you exercise you'll build muscle and lose fat so although the numbers may not change, your body composition, metabolism, and health are improving. If you're depending on a needle on a scale to tell you how you're doing, you may feel discouraged and tempted to give up even though great things are going on inside.

### Weighed Down

Some people weigh themselves because they want to be held accountable.

Accountable to a metal rectangle on the floor and a three digit number?

Have you ever said to yourself...

- I did so well this week. I deserve a treat!
- I was so good but I didn't lose any weight. I might as well eat.
- I don't have to weigh in until next week so I'll splurge now and make up for it later.
- I was terrible this week and I still lost weight. I guess I what eating and exercise doesn't matter so much.
- I only lost a half a pound. It wasn't worth it.

These thoughts are counter-productive to sustainable healthy lifestyle. The goal is mindful eating and physical activity without restrictive dieting – not answering to a judge and jury. Focus on the *process* not the *outcome*.

### Take the Weight Off Your Shoulders

- Be honest about how the numbers affect you. If knowing your weight tends to backfire, put your scale under the sink or out in the garage.
- Decide how often you need to weigh yourself. Some people prefer to be weighed only when they go to the doctor but for most people once a week or even once a month is plenty.
- You never need to weigh yourself more than once a day; if you do, you're playing games by measuring meaningless physiological fluctuations.
- Let go of old benchmarks. You may never again reach your wrestling or

wedding day weight but you can live an active lifestyle and make conscious choices that will serve you now.

- Don't weigh yourself to confirm what you already know. When you've been mindful of your choices, don't take a chance that the scale will give you an answer you didn't expect and derail your confidence.
- Don't use the scale to punish yourself. When you know you're out of balance, focus on the changes you'll make rather than beating yourself up.

### No Weigh

A man I met at a conference recently said, "I don't need a scale; I have pants." I smiled at the simplicity and accuracy of his method. A few ounces won't make a difference but a few pounds will determine how comfortable he feels. Look for other ways to assess your health and progress:

- Resting heart rate, blood pressure, cholesterol, or fasting blood sugar
- Minutes of walking, steps on your pedometer, or amount you're able to lift
- How do you feel? Tune in to your energy level, mood, and stamina

### Weigh Your Options

A scale is an external device that doesn't accurately measure what's going on inside your body *or* your head. Remember, meaningful change can only take place from the inside out.

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