



CONSUMED



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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 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

When you're losing weight gradually (clearly the best way), you may not see significant changes in your weight day to day, and perhaps even some weeks. Further, when you exercise you'll build muscle and lose fat so although the numbers might not change, your body composition is 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

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 don't need to be as careful.
- I only lost a half a pound. It wasn't worth it.

These thoughts are counter-productive to weight management. Further, although it can be motivating, losing weight can also be scary. Maybe a part of you doesn't believe you

deserve it or that you'll gain it back so you sabotage yourself.

Weight to Go

Some people weigh because they want to be held accountable. Accountable to a metal rectangle on the floor and a three digit number?

The goal is long term weight management without restrictive dieting – not answering to a judge and jury. Focus on the *process* not the *outcome*.

Why Weight?

Your weight is a surrogate measurement of your body fat so it's helpful for monitoring long term changes. Newer body fat scales are helpful but are only useful over time.

Your weight can also be used to calculate your Body Mass Index (BMI) which is a measure of your weight in relation to your height. (Caution: BMI can be misleading in highly muscled individuals.) Check the easy BMI calculator at <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>. BMI can help you and your health professional assess your risk for common conditions associated with excess weight. Even though BMI is widely used these days, it is only one piece of information.

Weight Around

Your waist circumference is another number your doctor might want to measure. A waist circumference over 40 inches for men and 35 inches for women is associated with metabolic syndrome and may increase your risk for certain diseases including diabetes and heart disease.

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 a good.

- 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 off track, 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 of monitoring himself. 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 too:

- Resting heart rate, blood pressure, cholesterol or fasting blood sugar
- Minutes of walking, steps on your pedometer or pounds of weight 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. If you're been consumed by the numbers, skip the scale for awhile, set new goals – and remember, meaningful change can only take place from the inside out.

Michelle May, M.D. is a recovered yoyo dieter and the award-winning author of *Am I Hungry? What to Do When Diets Don't Work*. Find additional articles and resources at <http://AmIHungry.com/>.