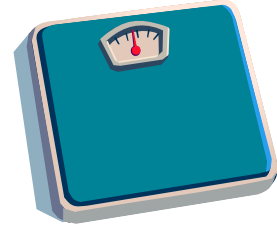


Weekly Weighing

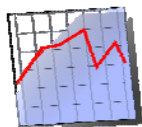


People with eating and body image problems may be very concerned with their weight and shape. Those people can find hopping on the scales stressful and anxiety provoking, and weighing themselves often impacts their feelings and behaviour. Some people do not like knowing their weight; they might avoid ever weighing themselves, because they are so scared of seeing the number on the scale. Others are so concerned about the number that they weigh themselves very frequently, sometimes multiple times throughout the day. Both of these approaches are unhelpful.

Problems with Avoiding Weighing

People who avoid weighing may do so because they are afraid of the number and what it will mean to them, or because they want to avoid the negative feelings they expect to feel if they do see a number they don't like. However, avoidance actually makes the fear and stress worse. For example, if someone had a phobia of dogs, we wouldn't expect their fear to go away if they avoid dogs for the rest of their life. To overcome the fear, their treatment would involve gradual exposure to dogs. Similarly, without exposure to the number on the scale:

1) **We never learn that the feared event doesn't always happen.** If we are so scared that our weight will change in a certain direction that we don't ever actually see it, then we don't learn that weight fluctuates regularly in both directions.



2) **We overestimate the consequences of the feared event.** When we are very concerned with our weight, this is usually because we place high importance on the number as an indicator of our worth, or how in control we are. If we never experience the number being different to what we want, we don't get to find out what actually happens in this scenario (and if we can learn the skills to cope with this!).

3) **We don't learn to tolerate negative emotions.** Like anything, practice is important. If we avoid weighing ourselves because we don't want to feel negative feelings, then we never learn how to tolerate those feelings. We also don't get the experience of working through them and coming out the other side, to learn they don't last forever.

When people repeatedly find that their feared event doesn't happen or isn't as bad as they expect, the fear will become less and less over time.

Problems with Frequent Weighing

Other people may be so driven to monitor their weight, they weigh themselves very frequently. When we frequently check the fluctuations in the number on the scale:

1) **We can become preoccupied with weight.** Frequent weighing reinforces the preoccupation with weight that maintains eating and body image problems. Part of recovery from these problems is learning to focus attention and energy on other areas of life, not just weight and shape. Frequent weighing gets in the way of this.

2) **We get misleading information.**

Everyone's weight has small fluctuations throughout the day, depending on factors like their food and liquid consumption, hormones, salt intake, and bowel and bladder function to name a few. These fluctuations can be up to 1-2 kg in a day. If people weigh themselves too often, these fluctuations can be misinterpreted as more meaningful than they are. When random weight changes are mistakenly attributed to dietary intake, people can react by restricting their food intake, which maintains eating problems.



For example, drinking 1 litre of water increases the number on the scale by 1 kg although it does not change actual body mass. As over 50% of our total body weight is water, fluid shifts can affect our weight significantly. This is especially the case if we reduce intake of carbohydrates - as the name implies, they help us stay hydrated, and we can lose fluid quickly when carbohydrates are restricted. Fluctuations in water balance will also be more extreme if bingeing and/or purging occurs.

Why Weekly Weighing?

When recovering from eating problems it can be helpful to measure weight once a week, at the same day and time every week. Measuring weight weekly and identifying weight patterns over a number of weeks will help identify long-term and *accurate* trends that can then be related to eating habits. Just as important in recovery is to stop letting the number on the scale dictate mood and self confidence for the day.

People who struggle to weigh themselves weekly may find that enlisting a support person to either keep their scales for safe-keeping, or to support them while weighing, is helpful. A psychologist or another health professional with experience in eating disorders can provide support.