Oh the scale, loved by few hated by most! A seemingly quantitative method for individuals to confirm to themselves that they are not good enough or not where they want to be. Regardless of where the ticking pendulum or brightly lit led lands, we always seem to want it to move in our desired direction more. How many times have you or someone you know “feel” fat after stepping off the scale? How many times has your mood completely changed for the worse because you have stared at a disheartening number, allowing it to define your attitude towards yourself? Believe it or not, this not a single gendered issue, as a nutrition coach, I have seen the scale affect both men and women’s mentality towards themselves and even life. Now, you have either clicked on this blog to have me tell you to throw the scale away or for me to tell you that the number on the scale does not matter. While I want to be able to give a definite answer that will make everyone happy, I can’t. Instead, I want to provide three methods to utilize the scale while “weighing” out the pros and cons of each, allowing you to decide which method is optimal for you.

Daily Weigh-ins:

Routinely weighing yourself every day can be viewed as an extreme approach when measuring progress. People may even consider this strategy as boarder-line obsessive. While there are plenty of people, I have been one of them, who struggle with an unhealthy need to check the scale regularly, there are numerous situations in which this method can be beneficial.

If you are committed to a diet regiment where you set a target fat loss goal/rate, checking your weight daily can be useful if you understand that the weekly average of your sum total is more important than what each individualized reading tells you. More so, you realize that the trend of your weekly averages are more important than one week in particular. A benefit of daily check-ins is it allows for a more accurate weekly check-in in comparison to a standard one-time weekly check-in by eliminating the chance of inaccuracy caused by water retention, a slowed GI tract, constipation, low activity, and reduced time-frame from your last meal to your weigh in. All these are variables that can and will impede accurate readings. Daily check-ins while having benefits are not made for everyone! If you find yourself allowing your mood and overall well-being controlled by the number on the scale, daily check-ins can be a recipe for disaster! I strongly advise answering very honestly to the following question; will the number on the scale ruin my day? If you even think it might, I suggest considering the next two options.

Weekly Weigh-ins:

Weekly weigh-ins are of more common practice when individuals are working towards a specific body composition and weight. Reducing your check-in days to once a week allows for us to not focus on the scale each day and might be overall less stressful. It’s best to choose a day where you can allow for adequate amount of time from your last meal. This is why mornings are considered most accurate as you are consistently checking on a somewhat empty stomach with no extra fluids in you. Checking the scale at a time like 5pm makes little sense, unless consuming the same amount of meals and liquid prior. Even then you have to bring into consideration the amount of activity you have implemented prior. While weekly weigh-ins may seem more reasonable than daily checks for the general population, it needs to be considered that the reduced variables mentioned in daily weigh-ins are more likely to offset accurate readings of weekly checks. This is why it’s important to follow a trend of your weekly check in over an extended period of time before making drastic changes.

Not weighing in:

The last consideration is to simply not weigh yourself. This is an excellent option for those who have struggled with self-image issues, eating disorders, or have admitted that the number on the scale significantly affects their mood. To be completely frank, nobody views you as a number and unless you are trying to make weight for a competitive sport, the scale can be completely bypassed and progress can still be accurately tracked. Utilizing different methods of measurement like; tape measures, how clothes fit, and overall energy can tell you just as much and more as a number on the scale. The only consequence of not weighing yourself is the increased reliance on subjectivity and not objectivity; how you think you look and progress vs. how you really look and are progressing. Periodically measuring with a tape measure can reduce the risk of this negatively impacting you though.

Daily check-ins are great for accountability and accuracy, but can create obsessive behavior and can impact your attitude significantly towards yourself and your day. Weekly check-ins are great to keep account of you progress while also not having to think about it daily, but can lead to inaccurate readings promoting extreme changes in diet and activity. Never weighing in can free you from the vice of feeling defined by a number and allow for other measures to track progress.

So which one is right for you? Well that’s for you to decide, but if you were to ask me I’d say whichever one will create the best balance of adherence to your goal and positive attitude towards your self-worth. By understanding that there is much more to health than the number on the scale, you can start to fall in love with the process and create long lasting changes that will truly keep you healthy, both physically and mentally.