

The scale is a poor judge

A short book about weighing yourself daily and letting the
number set your mood

unbry · Free to read, yours to keep

<https://unbry.com/read/the-scale-is-a-poor-judge>

First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

Contents

1. Before you start
2. Ten past seven, before the kettle
3. Why the step makes sense
4. "The number is the truth about my body"
5. "If it's up, I ate too much yesterday"
6. "If it's down, I'm doing well"
7. "Daily weighing keeps me honest"
8. "Without the scale I'd lose control"
9. "The scale is the only objective measure"
10. "A good morning earns something, a bad one has to be paid for"
11. "Everyone slim weighs every day"
12. "It's only a number, I can handle it"
13. "It's just how I start the day"
14. "I'll just check once more"
15. What the number costs you
16. What it does to the weight
17. Noise, and the line through it
18. Three ways to stop the swing
19. The weigh day
20. The break
21. What to measure instead, if anything

22. The decision

23. Programmes, partners, smart scales, doctors, teenagers and the jeans that do the same job

24. When it's more than a habit

25. When you got back on

26. Ten past seven, the kettle

27. Notes

Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, which is stepping on the bathroom scale every morning and letting the number decide what kind of day it's going to be. Not the weight. The number, and what it does to the next twelve hours.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that the habit makes sense from the inside. The scale is quick, it's objective, it answers a question you care about, and it feels like the one honest thing in the house. The second is that the number it gives you on any single morning isn't what you think it is. The scale weighs everything that is currently in you and on you, and from one day to the next most of what changes is water, food that hasn't left yet, salt, the stored fuel your muscles keep, and for many women the point in the month. A single morning's reading tells you almost nothing about fat, and the mood it sets is a response to noise. The third is practical. There are three honest ways to stop the number running your morning, and chapters 17 to 21 set them out so you can pick one and keep it for a month.

This isn't a weight-loss book. It won't tell you whether you should lose weight, and it won't give you a diet, a target or a number to aim at. Some readers will want to lose weight and some won't, and the argument here is the same for both. If you're in a programme that asks you to weigh, chapter 22 is written for you.

Three cautions.

If the number decides whether you eat at all, or you're eating very little, or you're making yourself sick or taking laxatives after eating, or you spend a lot of the day thinking about your weight and shape, that is beyond this book. The NHS lists those among the signs of an eating disorder and says to see a GP as soon as you can. The charity Beat has a helpline and a website, and the NHS page points to both.

If you've felt low most of the day, most days, for a fortnight or more, and the scale is one of the few things that still gets a reaction from you, the NHS says to see a GP. The number can wait until you have.

And if a doctor or nurse has asked you to weigh yourself every day for a medical reason, because of heart failure, for instance, or during pregnancy, keep doing exactly what they've asked. Chapter 23 says why that's different, and none of this book overrides it.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning rather than a finding, I'll say so.

Ten past seven, before the kettle

You're up. You've been to the bathroom, and before the kettle, before anything that might add weight, you step on. You do it the way you always do it, one foot then the other, and you stand still and look down and wait for the number to settle. It settles. And in the second after it settles, something in you settles too, or doesn't.

If it's down from yesterday, even by a little, the morning is fine. You get off, you feel lighter than the difference could possibly account for, and you go and put the kettle on with something like goodwill. The jeans on the chair go on without a thought. If it's up, the morning is not fine. You stand there a second longer, as though the number might change its mind. You think about last night, and you find the thing that did it. The curry. The second glass. The bread. You get off feeling heavier than the difference, and the jeans on the chair are a question now, and breakfast is a question, and you're a bit short with whoever's next in the bathroom.

Some mornings you get off and on again. Different position, or without the pyjama top, or after the loo. The second number is sometimes kinder, and you take that one.

That's invented, but I'd guess yours is close. Some words. **The step** is getting on the scale. **The number** is what it says. **The swing** is what the number does to your mood, up or down, in the second after it settles. **A good morning** and **a bad morning** are your own words for a low number and a high one, and I'll use them in your voice. **Noise** is the part of a day-to-day change that isn't fat, which chapter 3 argues is nearly all of it. **The line** is the direction the

number is going over weeks, which is the only thing the scale can actually tell you, and chapter 16 is about how to see it. **The settling up** is what you do to pay for a bad morning and what you allow yourself after a good one. **The second step** is weighing again a minute later. **The weigh day, the average** and **the break** are the three options in chapter 17.

Before you go on, do one thing. For the next seven mornings, keep weighing exactly as you do now, but write three things down each time. The number. How the morning feels in one word. And what you ate and drank after six the evening before, roughly, including salt and alcohol. Don't change anything yet. You'll want the sheet in chapter 4, and again in chapter 16.

Why the step makes sense

Nobody gets on the scale every morning because they've weighed up the evidence and decided a daily reading is the best use of the first minute of the day. They do it because it answers a question that matters to them, quickly, with a number, before anyone else is up. It's worth being honest about what the step gives you, because a habit that gave you nothing wouldn't have lasted.

It gives you certainty. You care about your weight, for reasons that may be good ones, and the scale is the one thing in the house that will tell you where it is without an opinion. It gives you an early warning. If something's going wrong, you'd rather know on Tuesday than at the end of the month, and the scale feels like the smoke alarm. It gives you a score. You ate carefully yesterday, or you didn't, and the number is the mark, and a mark is satisfying in a way that "I think I did all right" isn't. It gives you honesty, or what feels like it. You can lie to yourself about a lot of things and the scale isn't one of them. And it gives you control, or the feeling of it. As long as you're watching, nothing can creep up on you.

Underneath those there's a set of beliefs, and they're the chapters that follow. That the number is the truth about your body. That if it's up you ate too much and if it's down you did well. That daily weighing is what keeps you honest and what keeps you in control. That the scale is the only objective measure and so the one to trust. That a good morning earns something and a bad one has to be paid for. That everyone who's slim does this. That it's only a number and you can take it. That the mood stays in the bathroom. And that one more go will settle it.

Each of those has something true in it. Each is also doing the same job, which is making the number look like information when, on any single morning, it mostly isn't. This book isn't going to tell you not to care about your weight. It's going to look at what the scale actually measures, what the research says about weighing, which is less one-sided than either camp claims, and what the swing costs. Then it'll give you three ways to keep whatever the scale is good for and drop the part that's running your morning.

"The number is the truth about my body"

The scale is honest. It doesn't flatter and it doesn't sulk. So the number feels like the truth, and the truth it feels like is a truth about fat, because fat is the thing you're worried about. But that's not what a scale measures. It measures the downward force of everything that's currently in you and on you, and from one morning to the next, the things that change most aren't fat.

Start with water. Kreitzman, Coxon and Szaz, writing in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition in 1992, describe how the body's stored fuel, glycogen, is kept in the liver and muscles with three to four parts of water bound to it. Eat more carbohydrate than usual and you store more glycogen and more water with it, and the scale goes up by the weight of both. Eat less, or cut carbohydrate, and the store drains and the water goes with it, and the scale drops by a figure that looks like fat and is mostly a fuel tank emptying. Their paper is about very low calorie diets, but the mechanism is the same on an ordinary Tuesday.

Then salt. A salty meal holds water in the body until the kidneys have dealt with it, which takes a day or two. Then the contents of your gut, which on any morning include whatever hasn't left yet from the last day or so. Then the time of day, since you're lighter after the loo and before a drink, which is why you weigh when you do. Then clothes.

Then, for a lot of readers, the month. Spyridon Kanellakis and colleagues measured 42 women twice a week across one menstrual cycle and found weight about half a kilo higher during

menstruation than in the first week, and the difference was almost exactly the rise in the water outside the cells. A much older and much smaller study, by Bunt, Lohman and Boileau, followed seven women who reported big swings across the month and measured them at their lightest and heaviest. The average gap was about two kilos, and that's a self-selected seven, so don't take it as typical. Take it as a sign of how wide the range can be.

None of these is fat. Add them up and you have the ordinary range of a body doing what bodies do between one morning and the next. Fat changes too, of course. It changes slowly, in amounts a bathroom scale can't pick out from the rest of the traffic on any one day. The number is true. It just isn't the truth you're reading it as.

"If it's up, I ate too much yesterday"

The number is up, and you know why, because you can remember last night. The curry, the second glass, the bread you didn't need. The rise feels like the evidence and the meal feels like the crime. It's a neat story and it's the wrong one.

The meal is still in you. Whatever you ate after six last night hasn't all left, and what has left has been partly replaced by the water the salt in it is holding and the water the carbohydrate in it is now stored with. Kreitzman and colleagues make the point in the paper from chapter 3 that when someone who's been on a very low calorie diet eats carbohydrate again, the regain looks exaggerated, because the fuel store refills and brings its water with it. That's the extreme version. The mild version is Saturday night's rice showing up on Sunday's scale. The rise is real. It's also mostly leaving.

There's a study that shows the shape of this at the scale of a week. Anna-Leena Orsama and colleagues took 4,657 daily weights from 80 adults over periods of two weeks to nearly a year and found a pattern. Weight was highest on Sunday and Monday and fell through the week. The rise began on Saturday and the fall began on Tuesday. The people who lost weight or held steady over the whole period were the ones with the strongest weekday fall, and the authors' conclusion was that the weekend-to-weekday swing should be treated as normal rather than as a sign of gaining. I'd add something they don't say, which is that a Monday reading taken as a judgement on Sunday's dinner will be wrong every single week.

Look at your sheet from chapter 1. Find the mornings you called bad, and look at the evening before each one. My guess is that most of them follow a bigger, saltier or later meal, and that the number came back down within two days whether or not you did anything about it. If that's what your sheet shows, you've just watched noise, and you've watched yourself settle up for it.

What a rise on one morning tells you about fat is, on its own, nothing. What a rise that stays for three weeks tells you is something, and chapter 16 is about how to tell the two apart. The mistake isn't caring about the second kind. It's reading the first kind as though it were the second, every morning, and feeling the swing each time.

"If it's down, I'm doing well"

This one's harder to give up, because it feels good. The number is down, and you were careful yesterday, and the two facts join up into a small glow that lasts until lunch. I'm not going to tell you the glow is bad. I'm going to point out that it's built on exactly the same noise as the bad morning, and that if you keep one you keep the other.

Everything in chapter 3 runs both ways. Less carbohydrate yesterday means a smaller fuel store and less water this morning. A lighter, earlier dinner means less in transit. A day with less salt means the kidneys have caught up. Skip the second glass and there's less fluid on board. Each of those takes the number down, and none of them is fat leaving. The good morning after a careful day is mostly the careful day's water, and it's back the moment you eat normally, which you will, and should.

There's research that seems to say daily weighing works, and it's worth seeing what it actually shows. Dori Steinberg and colleagues looked at 47 overweight adults in the intervention arm of a six-month weight-loss trial. About half weighed every day. The rest averaged just over five days a week. The daily weighers lost about six kilos more and took up more of the programme's weight control behaviours. That's a small secondary analysis, and everyone in it was in a structured programme with weekly lessons and feedback. What it shows is that over six months, in a programme, people who weighed daily did better. It doesn't show that any one morning's

number meant anything, and it doesn't show that feeling good on the low mornings was part of what helped. If anything the mechanism the authors point to is the behaviours, not the mood.

So the good morning is as unearned as the bad one, in the sense that neither is telling you what you think it's telling you. That's my reading, not a finding, but I think the sheet from chapter 1 will back it. Find a good morning and look at what preceded it. Then find the morning two days later.

The reason this matters is that the glow is what keeps you stepping on. A habit that only ever hurt would have died. It's the good mornings that make the bad ones feel worth it, and they're made of the same water.

"Daily weighing keeps me honest"

Here's where the research really is on your side, up to a point, and it's worth being straight about it. Regular self-weighing has a good record in weight-loss studies. Yaguang Zheng and colleagues reviewed 17 longitudinal studies of adults seeking treatment for their weight and found that regular self-weighing, daily or weekly, was associated with more weight loss and not with depression or anxiety. Rena Wing and colleagues, in a trial of 314 people who had each lost about nineteen kilos, built a maintenance programme around daily weighing and found that after eighteen months about seventy-two per cent of the control group had regained two kilos or more, against forty-six per cent of those who'd had the programme face to face. Daily weighing went up in the programme groups and was associated with less regain. Carly Pacanowski and David Levitsky gave 162 overweight adults a scale and a graph of their weight and found the daily weighers lost a modest amount more over a year, and held it.

So the honest version of the claim is true. Weighing, used as information inside an effort to change something, helps. But look at who these people were and what they were doing. They'd chosen a programme. They were reading the number as a data point on a chart, with lessons and feedback around it, and the studies measured whether the chart went down over months. Claire Madigan and colleagues, in a meta-analysis of randomised trials, found that the one study of self-weighing on its own, with nothing

around it, showed no evidence of effect. Adding weighing to a programme helped. And it made no difference whether people were told to weigh daily or weekly.

Now look at what you're doing. You're reading one number, in the second after it settles, as a mark. There's no chart. There's a swing. The honesty in those trials wasn't in the scale, it was in what people did with the reading, which was to plot it and act on the line. That's the part you've dropped, and it's the part that did the work.

I'd put it this way, and it's my interpretation. The scale can't be honest or dishonest. It reports a force. Honesty is in the response, and a response to noise, however sincere, isn't honesty. It's a reflex with a number attached.

"Without the scale I'd lose control"

This is the fear underneath the habit, and it deserves a straight answer rather than reassurance. You're afraid that if you stop looking, the weight will move without you noticing, and by the time you notice it'll be a stone and not a pound. The scale feels like the thing holding it in place.

There's a finding that seems to confirm this. Elina Helander and colleagues looked at 2,838 weights from 40 people on a health programme and found that weight loss happened during stretches of daily weighing and that gaps longer than a month were associated with gain. That's real, and it's in the notes. But look again at who it is. People in a programme, whose gap in weighing probably meant a gap in the programme, which the authors themselves say. It doesn't show that the step was what held the weight down. It shows that when people stopped doing the whole thing, the whole thing stopped working.

Madigan's meta-analysis from chapter 6 is the more useful fact here. Weighing on its own, with nothing else changed, had no evidence of doing anything. That's the closest the research comes to testing your belief directly, and it doesn't support it. The scale doesn't hold anything. What holds weight where it is, or moves it, is what you eat and do over weeks, and you'll be doing that with or without a number in the morning.

Here's what I think the scale actually is for you, and it's an interpretation. It's an alarm, not a brake. An alarm tells you something's happening. It doesn't stop it. And an alarm that goes

off every morning for reasons that have nothing to do with fire is one you stop being able to hear, which is the state you're in. The bad mornings aren't warnings, they're Saturday's rice, and because they come so often you've no way of picking out the one that would matter.

If what you actually want is to notice a real change in time to do something about it, a weekly weigh day and a line, chapters 16 and 18, will catch a real change within a month and will never once mistake a curry for one. If what you want is the feeling of control, I'd look at whether the daily step is giving you that or the opposite. A control that has to be checked every morning and that sets your mood each time isn't control. It's the thing being controlled.

If the fear is bigger than this, if it's tied to a diet you're always about to start or have just failed at, Breakfast isn't the problem, in this series, is about that cycle and is a better book for it than this one.

"The scale is the only objective measure"

You've probably tried the alternatives and found them wanting. The mirror lies according to the light and your mood. Clothes stretch. How you feel is hopeless as a gauge. The scale is the one thing that gives the same answer whoever's asking, and that's why you trust it. Objective, you think, is the same as meaningful.

It isn't, and the distinction is the whole of this chapter. A measurement can be perfectly accurate and still tell you nothing about the thing you care about, if the thing you care about isn't what it measures on that occasion. Your scale, to the nearest hundred grams, is probably right. What it's right about is the total load on the mat at ten past seven, which chapter 3 took apart. It's an objective measure of a quantity that swings for a dozen reasons, and only one of those reasons is the one you're asking about.

Here's the one analogy I'll use in this chapter. If you wanted to know whether the sea level was rising, you wouldn't stand on the beach and read the waterline once a morning, because the tide would make a fool of you twice a day. You'd average over months and look at the drift underneath. The tide is objective too. It just isn't the answer to the question.

A single reading, then, has no meaning on its own. It only means something as one point among many, once you can see which way the points are going. Researchers call that separating signal from noise, and the words are plain enough to keep. The signal is the slow change in fat, if there is one. The noise is everything in chapter 3. On one morning, the noise is bigger than the signal

could possibly be, so the reading is all noise as far as your question goes. Over four weeks, the noise averages out, because water comes and goes and the month completes, and whatever's left is signal.

The scale can give you the signal. It's the only household object that can. But it can only give it to you as a line, and you've been asking it for a point. The trials in chapter 6 that found weighing helpful were, almost without exception, trials in which people plotted the number. The objectivity was the same in your bathroom and in their study. The difference was that they let it accumulate into something that meant something, and you read it fresh each morning and react.

So keep the trust. The scale has earned it. Just move the trust from the number to the line, and stop asking the point for an answer it hasn't got.

"A good morning earns something, a bad one has to be paid for"

This is the settling up, and it's where the swing stops being a mood and starts being a meal. A bad morning and breakfast becomes optional. Lunch gets smaller. You add a walk you didn't want, or skip the thing you'd planned to enjoy. A good morning and something is allowed, the biscuit, the second helping, the takeaway you'd have felt bad about yesterday. The number has become a ledger, and you're paying it off or spending its credit before nine.

Two things are wrong with this. The first you already know from chapters 4 and 5. The bill is for water and the credit is for water, so you're skipping breakfast to pay for Saturday's salt and eating cake on the strength of a drained fuel store. The second is what the settling up does over time, and there's research on that.

Virginia Quick and colleagues surveyed 2,287 young adults, average age twenty-five, and found that those who weighed a few times a week or more were more likely to be dieting, more likely to use both sensible and unhealthy ways of controlling their weight, and, among the women, more likely to report binge eating. That's a cross-sectional survey, so it can't say which came first. Dianne Neumark-Sztainer and colleagues followed 2,516 adolescents for five years, and there the order is clearer. Girls who weighed frequently at the start were more likely, five years later, to be using unhealthy weight control and to be binge eating, after adjusting for what they were doing at the start. In the younger girls, frequent weighing predicted weight gain, not loss. Boys showed none of it.

These are studies of young people and they're about frequency of weighing, not about the settling up as such. But I think the mechanism is visible in your own week. Skip breakfast for a bad morning and you're hungrier at four, and the eating at four is bigger than the breakfast was, and tomorrow's number is up, and you skip again. That's the shape those surveys are describing, and it's the shape a scale used as a ledger produces.

If the thing you reach for after a bad morning is food, or the thing you reach for after a good one is food, then the number has become the trigger for eating that has nothing to do with hunger. Eat when you're hungry, in this series, is about that, and The feeling will pass without help is about the reach itself. And if the settling up has hardened into a diet you start and abandon, Breakfast isn't the problem is the book.

The alternative isn't to stop caring what you eat. It's to stop letting a number made of water decide it. Breakfast is breakfast. It doesn't owe the scale anything.

"Everyone slim weighs every day"

You picture slim people as people who keep an eye on it, and keeping an eye on it means the scale, and so daily weighing looks like the habit of the people you'd like to be. It's an understandable picture. It's also mostly wrong, and where it's right it's right about a different group from you.

Start with how common it is. In Quick's survey from chapter 9, weighing a few times a week or more was reported by eighteen per cent of young women and twelve per cent of young men. That's a minority, and it's a minority that, in the same survey, had more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem among the women and lower body satisfaction among the men. Slim wasn't the defining feature of the group. Weight concern was.

Now the other side, because there is one. Pacanowski, Linde and Neumark-Sztainer reviewed twenty papers on self-weighing and how people felt, and found the results split by who was being studied. Among women and younger people, frequent weighing went with worse mood, lower self-esteem, worse feelings about the body and more disordered eating. Among overweight adults who had chosen to seek treatment, it went with no harm, and sometimes with benefit. Lori Klos and colleagues found the same split by sex among 268 students. Frequent weighing in women went with preoccupation about being overweight and concern about shape. In men it went with an interest in fitness and feeling better about the body.

So the true version of the belief is this. Some people weigh daily and it works for them, and they tend to be people who've decided to change something, are in a programme or something like one, and read the number as a point on a chart. The picture of the slim person calmly noting the figure and getting on with the day is a real person. It's just that the calm comes from the chart, not the step.

Which group are you in? Not by weight, by what the number does. If you got off this morning and the number set the mood, you're in the first group whatever you weigh. The research says the habit is at best doing nothing for you and at worst doing the things in chapter 9. The people it helps aren't feeling the swing. That's the difference, and it's the whole difference.

"It's only a number, I can handle it"

You know the arguments in chapters 3 to 5, or you knew a version of them already. You know water goes up and down. You've told yourself on a bad morning that it's probably water. And it hasn't helped, or not much, because the swing arrived before the argument did and outlasted it. This chapter is about why knowing doesn't stop it, so that you stop blaming yourself for being unable to think your way out.

Ogden and Evans ran an experiment in 1996 that I find hard to forget. They took 74 people of ordinary weight, measured their mood and self-esteem, weighed them, and then showed each one a fictional height-and-weight chart that placed them, at random, as underweight, average or overweight. Nothing about the person had changed. The number on the scale was their real weight. Only the label on the chart was invented. The people told they were overweight showed a rise in depression and a fall in self-esteem, measured minutes later. The ones told they were average improved on both.

Think about what that shows. A number that a person knows is being compared against a chart they've never seen, that has no bearing on their actual body, moved their mood in the time it takes to read it. If a made-up label can do that to people who weren't even worried, an actual number can do it to someone who steps on every morning specifically to find out. The swing isn't a failure of understanding. It's what a number about your body does to a person, before understanding gets a chance.

The authors were writing about clinics, and their point was that weighing patients and comparing them to charts might not be as harmless as everyone assumed. I'd extend it to bathrooms. You aren't weak for reacting. You're doing what 74 ordinary people did in a room in the nineties.

This matters for what comes later, because it rules out one plan. The plan where you keep weighing daily and just decide not to mind. You can't decide not to mind, or not reliably, and every morning you try and fail is another morning where you feel you've failed at something, which is a second swing on top of the first. The options in chapter 17 all work by changing what the number is, or when you see it, rather than by asking you to feel differently about it.

"It's just how I start the day"

The swing, you'd say, is over by the time you've dressed. A bad morning is a bad ten minutes. It doesn't come to work. So the cost is small and the habit is cheap. I don't think that's what happens, and I'd ask you to check your own sheet from chapter 1, where the one word for the morning was written after the number and not before.

Here's where the swing goes. It goes to breakfast, chapter 9. It goes to the jeans, which on a bad morning become the other trousers, which become a day of feeling as though you're wearing the other trousers. It goes to the mirror at work. It goes into the tone you take with the first person who asks you something. And it goes into a running assessment of yourself that has nothing to do with the number and everything to do with the mood the number set. You wouldn't say it to a friend, in this series, is about that assessment, and I'd only add that the scale is one of its most reliable morning triggers.

There's a longer view. Carly Pacanowski and colleagues followed 1,868 people from adolescence into their late twenties, asking about weighing and about how they felt at three points across ten years. At every point, weighing went with more concern about weight, in both sexes. In women it went with lower self-esteem at every point. And when a woman's weighing increased from one point to the next, her body satisfaction and self-esteem fell and her weight concern and depressive symptoms rose, across the same interval. In men only the weight concern rose. This is a survey and

it can't prove the weighing caused the feeling. But it isn't a study of ten minutes in a bathroom. It's a study of years, and the feeling is not confined to the mornings.

I'd put it like this. The number sets the mood, and the mood sets the day, and a few hundred days of that sets something more like a stance. A stance towards your own body that's renewed every morning by an instrument reading water. You'd notice if a person did that to you. It's harder to notice when it's a flat white square on the bathroom floor.

Ten minutes was the claim. Check the sheet. If the word you wrote on a bad morning is the word for the day, it wasn't ten minutes.

"I'll just check once more"

The number is up and you don't believe it, so you step off and step on again. Or you take the top off, or you shift your feet, or you go to the loo and come back. The second number is different, sometimes by a lot for something that took forty seconds, and if it's kinder you take it and if it's crueller you take the first. Either way you've stood on the scale twice before the kettle, and the third time is always available.

The second step can't settle anything, and it helps to know exactly why. Bathroom scales aren't precise to the hundred grams they display, and they read differently if you're placed differently on the platform, if the platform is on a different bit of floor, if you've moved, breathed out, or lost a little water in the loo. None of those is fat. So the two readings are two samples of the same noise, and choosing between them is choosing which noise you'd like to believe. The second step feels like checking. It's actually a second roll of the same dice.

You've checked already, in this series, is about checking the door, the oven and the email, and one of the things it says is that a second check makes you less sure rather than more, because the second look competes with the first in memory and neither wins. The scale is a cleaner case than the door, because the second reading really is different, and so the uncertainty has something to feed on. You now have two numbers and a reason to want a third.

What the second step is doing, I think, is trying to make the number say something bearable, and the fact that you're doing it is the clearest sign in this book that the number has stopped being information. Nobody rechecks a data point. You recheck a judgement you don't like. If you notice yourself reaching for the second step, that's the moment to notice that you're arguing with water.

The rule, which all three options in chapter 17 share, is one step or none. One reading, written down, and off. If you don't like it, that's allowed, and the dislike goes in the notebook next to the number if you want, and it's still one reading. The second step is the habit telling you it wants a better number. You've stopped taking orders from it.

What the number costs you

The scale costs nothing, sits in a corner, takes a minute. If it weren't for the swing, that would be the end of the accounting. But you've read chapter 12, so let's do the accounting properly, and let's leave weight out of it, because whatever the scale is costing you, weight isn't the currency.

It costs you the first minute of the day, which sounds trivial until you notice that the first minute sets the tone of the next hour, and that on perhaps half your mornings, if your sheet looks like the sheets I'd expect, you've handed that minute to a number made of water.

It costs you meals. The settling up in chapter 9 means that what you eat on any given day is partly decided by last night's salt. A skipped breakfast here, an unearned cake there, a hungrier four o'clock than there needed to be, and a pattern of eating that answers to the scale rather than to appetite. Over a year, that's several hundred meals bent slightly out of shape for no reason.

It costs you the mood you bring to other people. The short answer in the bathroom doorway. The temper on the school run. The evening spent being someone who had a bad morning, with a partner or child who didn't and can't see why.

It costs you clothes you own and don't wear, on the mornings the number says you can't. It costs you the mirror. It costs you a stance towards your body that's renewed daily and that Pacanowski's ten years suggest doesn't stay in the bathroom.

And there's a bigger one, which I'll only touch because it's a book of its own. When the number decides whether it's a good day, it's very easy for the number to start deciding when life starts. The holiday when the number's right. The photograph when the number's right. The swimming, the dress, the date. That's putting things off until a reading of water and glycogen says yes, and the reading never quite does, and years go.

What you get for all this, from chapter 2, is certainty, a warning, a score, honesty and control, and chapters 3 to 11 have argued that on a daily basis you get none of those, only the feeling of them, on the good mornings, at the price of the bad ones. Whether that's a good bargain is your call. I'd only ask you to see the whole bill before you decide.

What it does to the weight

This chapter is short and it's the one place I'll talk about weight itself, because you'll want to know. Does the daily step at least keep the weight down? For you, as you're using it, I doubt it, and here's the reasoning, which is mine and not a finding.

The trials in chapter 6 found weighing helpful in people who plotted it and acted on the line inside a programme. Madigan's meta-analysis found no evidence that weighing on its own did anything, and no difference between daily and weekly. So the daily step, as opposed to the line, isn't what the research credits.

What the daily step gives you, chapter 9, is the settling up. Skipped breakfast, bigger four o'clock, the good morning's cake. Orsama's weekly pattern from chapter 4 is worth looking at again here. The people whose weight came down or held over months were the ones with the strongest fall through the week after the weekend rise. The authors call that compensation, and they say it's normal. But the compensation in that study wasn't mood-driven. It was people going back to eating normally after a weekend, and the scale following.

The settling up is different. It's a reaction to the swing, and it produces its own swing, because the skipped breakfast makes the four o'clock bigger and the four o'clock makes tomorrow's number worse. Neumark-Sztainer's five-year finding, that frequent weighing in younger girls predicted weight gain rather than loss, is at least consistent with that, though it's a study of adolescents and I wouldn't lean on it harder than that.

So here's my honest answer. If you want the scale's help with your weight, use it the way the trials did, as a line over weeks, chapters 16 to 18. Used that way it may help, modestly, and it won't set your mood. Used as a daily mark with a settling up attached, I think it's more likely to move your weight around than down, and it's certainly moving your mornings.

And if you don't want to change your weight at all, and just want the mornings back, the break in chapter 19 is for you, and nothing in the research suggests you'll come to harm in a month without a number.

Noise, and the line through it

Everything so far has said the same thing from different sides. The number on one morning is noise, and the only thing the scale can tell you is the line. This chapter is about what a line looks like, so that when you see one you'll know it, and when you don't you'll know that too.

Take your sheet from chapter 1, if you kept it going, or the last few weeks of readings if you've got them anywhere. Write the numbers in a column with the dates. Now, instead of reading them one at a time, take each week's readings and average them. If you weighed seven times, add the seven and divide by seven. Write the weekly averages in a second column. Look at that column and only that column.

What you'll usually see is that the daily numbers jump about, up half a kilo, down a kilo, up again, and that the weekly averages hardly move. That flat column is the line, and it's telling you that over the period, nothing much happened to your weight, whatever the mornings felt like. Orsama's study from chapter 4 is a picture of exactly this. The Monday numbers looked like gain and the Thursday numbers looked like loss and the week as a whole was going wherever it was going, slowly.

Sometimes the averages do move. Three or four weekly averages in a row going the same way, each a little further than the last, is a line, and it's real. That's the signal, and it's the thing a smoke alarm should be for. It takes about four weeks to see, in my experience of looking at these columns, because a single week can be pushed

around by the time of the month or a holiday or an illness, and it takes a few weeks for that to wash out. Four weeks is the figure I'll use through the rest of the book. It's a judgement, not a finding.

The one analogy for this chapter. A tape measure is a good instrument, and if you measured your waist over a winter coat you'd get a true reading of the wrong thing. The scale over a curry is the tape over the coat.

To get a line worth reading, the readings need to be taken the same way each time, which is why you already weigh before the kettle. Same time, same state of dress, after the loo, before anything else. Same scale on the same bit of floor. That doesn't make any single reading mean more. It makes the readings comparable, so that the average is an average of like with like.

Once you can see the line, the number on any given morning loses its grip, because you've watched a whole column of numbers that looked like judgements turn out to be nothing at all. That's the understanding this book is trying to give you. The next chapter is about what to do with it.

Three ways to stop the swing

There isn't one right answer here, and I'm not going to pretend there is. There are three, and they suit different readers, and the decision in chapter 21 is to pick one and hold it for four weeks. I'll set them out and say who each is for.

The weigh day. You weigh once a week, on the same morning, in the same conditions, and write the number in the notebook by the scale. The rest of the week the scale stays where it is and you don't step on it. Once a month you look at the four numbers and see which way they point. This is for the reader who wants to keep an eye on things, who has a reason to know if their weight is moving, and who finds that one number a week is something they can read as a data point rather than a mark. The catch is that one reading a week is still one reading, and a bad weigh day can still swing. Chapter 18 is about how to take the swing out of it.

The average. You keep weighing every morning, but you never react to the number. You write it down without reading it, or you use a scale that records it and hides it, and on Sunday you average the seven and that's the only figure you look at. This is for the reader in a weight-loss programme, or one who's decided to lose weight and wants the evidence from chapter 6 on their side. It keeps the daily step the trials found useful and throws away the daily number that this book has argued is noise. The catch is that it takes some discipline not to look, and if you find you're looking, chapter 24 is for you and you should probably switch to one of the others.

The break. The scale goes in the cupboard for four weeks. You don't weigh at all. You notice what the mornings are like without a number in them, and at the end of the month you decide whether you want it back and on what terms. This is for the reader who doesn't need to change their weight, or who isn't trying to just now, and whose real problem is the swing. It's also for the reader who suspects the scale has become something they can't read as information at all, for whom even a weekly number would become a weekly mark. Chapter 19 is about the break and what to expect from it. The catch is the fear from chapter 7, which is real and which the chapter addresses.

All three share two rules. One step or none, never a second. And the number, when there is one, is written down and read as part of a column, never on its own.

Which one? If you're in a programme, the average. If you've a reason to watch your weight and you can bear a weekly number, the weigh day. If the mornings are the problem and the weight isn't, the break. If you're not sure, I'd take the break, because four weeks tells you the most, and you can always move to the weigh day afterwards with a clearer head.

The weigh day

Pick the morning. It wants to be one that's usually ordinary. Not Monday, because of Orsama's weekend rise, and not the morning after your usual big night. For most people something like Wednesday or Thursday works, and once it's picked it doesn't move. If you miss it, you don't weigh on Friday instead. You wait until next week. A reading on a different day isn't comparable and it's also the daily habit sneaking back in through a side door.

Same conditions each time, chapter 16. After the loo, before the kettle, same clothes or none, same scale on the same tiles. Step on once, read it, write it in the notebook that lives next to the scale, and step off. That's the weigh day. It's over in the same minute it always took.

Then the harder part. The number will still try to swing you, because you've spent years training it to. The first few weigh days, expect the same reaction you'd have had on any morning, and expect it to feel stronger, because it's been a week. Here's what to do with it. Look at the notebook, not the scale. Under this week's number there's last week's, and the week before. If there are fewer than four, there's no line yet and the number can't be read, and you say that to yourself in so many words. Not enough points. If there are four or more, look at where they're heading, and read that instead of today.

The other six mornings the scale doesn't get stepped on. It can stay on the floor if you can walk past it. If you can't, it goes in the cupboard from Thursday to Wednesday, and comes out for its

minute. There's no shame in the cupboard. The cupboard is a tool.

What you're likely to find, and this is expectation rather than finding, is that after a month the weigh day is a fairly dull event. A number, a note, a glance at three others, kettle on. The swing shrinks, not because you've decided not to feel it, chapter 11 said that doesn't work, but because the number has become one of a set, and a set is a much less frightening thing than a point. Some readers find after a couple of months that they forget the weigh day, and I'd treat that as good news rather than a lapse, as long as it's forgetting and not avoiding.

And if a real line appears, four weeks going the same way, you've got what the scale was always for. Something to act on, if you want to act, arrived in good time and without a single false alarm. That's the only version of "keeping an eye on it" that actually keeps an eye on anything.

The break

The scale goes in the cupboard, and it goes today, not after a last reading. A last reading is a mark, and the break starts with a mark unless you refuse it one. Put it somewhere that takes a small effort to get at. Under the sink behind the cleaning things, or on top of the wardrobe. Not the bin. You may want it back, on new terms, and you should have the choice.

The first week is the hard one, and it's hard in a specific way. The habit will present itself at ten past seven as a small blank where the number used to be, and the blank will feel like not knowing, and not knowing will feel like the fear from chapter 7. You'll find yourself, in the shower, doing the sum in your head. Curry last night, probably up. You may find your hand going to the mat. Notice it and go and put the kettle on. The blank is what a morning is without a number in it. It's not a gap in your knowledge. It's a gap in your surveillance, and those are different things.

The second week, the blank gets smaller. The evening meal stops being an entry in tomorrow's ledger, because there's no ledger tomorrow, and you may notice that you're eating a bit more like someone who's hungry and a bit less like someone paying something off. Breakfast happens because it's morning. The jeans go on or don't according to the weather.

By the third and fourth week, for many readers, the morning has been given back. That's the thing to notice, and it's worth writing down at the end of the month in one sentence, because it's what you're weighing the scale against. Not your weight. Your mornings.

Two things to expect that aren't pleasant. One is that, somewhere in the month, you'll be certain you've gained, and you'll have no way to check, and that will feel intolerable for about a day. That's the fear doing what fear does when it's denied its ritual, and chapter 7 argued that the ritual was never holding anything. Wait it out. The other is that clothes may start to do the scale's job, and chapter 22 has a case about that.

At the end of four weeks, you decide. Some readers leave the scale in the cupboard and never think about it again. Some bring it out for a weigh day, chapter 18, with a notebook and a rule, and find that after a month off they can read the number as a number. Some bring it out, step on, feel the old swing arrive in full, and put it straight back, having learned what they needed to. All three are good outcomes. What none of them is, is the daily step with the daily mood, and that was the point.

What to measure instead, if anything

Some readers can't take the break without something to replace the number, and it's fair to ask what. The honest first answer is that you may not need a replacement. The number was answering a question you asked every morning, and the question, as chapters 3 to 8 argued, wasn't one the number could answer. Drop the question for a month and see whether you miss it or only miss the ritual.

If you do want something, here are the candidates, each with its limit.

Clothes. A particular pair of trousers, done up, is a crude measure of the waist that doesn't swing with glycogen the way the scale does. It can tell you over months if something's changing. The limit is chapter 22's case. Trousers can become the number, tried on every morning, with a swing attached, and if you find yourself doing that you've moved the habit rather than dropped it.

The waist itself. The NHS, on its page about overweight and obesity, says that BMI can't tell muscle from fat and suggests the waist to height ratio alongside it, with the aim of keeping the waist to less than half your height. It's a once-a-month measurement at most, and the NHS page shows how to take it. Its virtue is that it's slow and dull. Nobody feels a swing from a tape measure they use twelve times a year.

How you are. Stairs, the walk to the station, sleep, energy. These are what the weight was supposed to be a proxy for, and they're available directly. The limit is that they're vague, and vague is what you were trying to escape. But vague and honest may be better for a while than precise and meaningless.

Nothing. Which is where I'd start. For a month, measure nothing, and let the body do what it's going to do without a witness. If at the end of the month you find you want a measure, pick the slowest one on this list.

What you shouldn't do is swap the daily number for a daily anything. Daily is the problem, not the instrument. A daily tape measure, a daily photograph, a daily trying-on, would each reproduce the swing within a fortnight, because each gives you a point to react to, and you've spent years learning to react to points. The whole of this book has been an argument for lines. Anything you measure instead should be measured slowly enough to draw one.

The decision

Here's what I'd suggest, and it's one rule with three versions, chosen once and held for four weeks.

The rule. One reading or none, written down, read as part of a column and never on its own. In the weigh day version, that's one reading a week. In the average version, it's a daily reading you don't look at and a weekly figure you do. In the break version, it's none for a month.

Choose now, before the next morning, because the next morning is when the habit will make the choice for you. Chapter 17 said which suits whom. If you're in doubt, take the break.

Then three plans in the form the research calls implementation intentions, which Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran found, across a large body of studies, to make a decided action much more likely to happen. The form is when this, then that, with the this being a specific moment and the that being a specific act.

When I walk into the bathroom in the morning, then I do the thing I've chosen. For the break, that's walk past where the scale was and put the kettle on. For the weigh day, on the six other mornings it's the same, and on the day it's one step, one number in the notebook, off. For the average, it's step on, write the number without reading it, off.

When the number swings me, then I look at the column and not the scale. If there are fewer than four entries, I say not enough points. If there are four or more, I read the direction, not today.

When my hand goes to the mat on a day it shouldn't, then I say the words out loud, or as good as. That's water. And I go and do the next thing. The words aren't a spell. They're a reminder of chapter 3 at the moment chapter 3 is most likely to be forgotten.

What to expect. Phillippa Lally and colleagues followed 96 volunteers learning a new daily habit and found that it took, on average, a couple of months to become automatic, with a wide range, and that missing a single day made no material difference to how the habit formed. The habit here is partly a not-doing, which is different, but I'd expect the same shape. The first week is effort, the second is less, and somewhere in the second month the bathroom is just a bathroom. And one morning back on the scale, chapter 24, doesn't undo it.

What you don't do. You don't announce it, unless there's someone in the house who weighs too, in which case chapter 22 has a word. You don't replace it with a daily anything, chapter 20. And you don't, on any version, take a second step.

That's the decision. It's small, it's specific, it takes a month, and at the end of the month you'll know something about your mornings that you can't know any other way.

Programmes, partners, smart scales, doctors, teenagers and the jeans that do the same job

Every reader has a reason the general advice doesn't quite fit. Here are the ones I'd expect, each in turn.

You're in a weight-loss programme that asks you to weigh. Then weigh, and the average in chapter 17 is your version. The trials in chapter 6 are on your side, and the programme's weekly weigh-in, if it has one, is already a weigh day with a line attached. What this book asks is only that the daily number, if you take one, goes into a notebook or an app unread, and that the figure you react to is the week's. If the programme wants you to react to the daily number, I'd ask them why, given that Madigan's meta-analysis found no difference between daily and weekly instruction.

Your partner weighs every morning and says the number out loud. You can't take their scale away, and you shouldn't try. You can take yourself out of the room. Ask, once, plainly, for the number not to be said, because you're trying to stop it running your morning. Most partners will manage that. If they weigh in the same bathroom at the same time and the scale is out on the floor, your break may need the scale to live in a cupboard they agree to. That's a conversation and not a fight, and if it turns into a fight, the fight isn't about the scale.

Your scale reports body fat, water and muscle. It does so by passing a small current through you and estimating from the resistance, and the estimate moves with hydration, which is to say with everything in chapter 3. A body fat figure that changes by a

percentage point overnight has measured your water, not your fat. Treat every number the scale gives you the same way, as one point in a column, or switch the extra readouts off, which most of them allow. A scale that gives four numbers to swing on is four times the problem.

A doctor has told you to lose weight. That's a real reason to know whether your weight is moving, and the weigh day is your version, with the line shown to the doctor at the next appointment rather than the morning's figure. The NHS page on overweight says that losing even a small proportion of body weight can improve health. It doesn't say to weigh every day, and nothing in the advice needs you to.

There's a teenager in the house. The five-year study in chapter 9 found that frequent weighing in girls predicted unhealthy weight control and binge eating years later, and its authors say that programmes aimed at adolescents should avoid encouraging it. So the scale in the cupboard is a good idea for reasons beyond you, and so is not saying your number out loud, and not commenting on theirs. If a teenager is weighing often and the mood seems to depend on it, the NHS eating disorders page is worth reading with chapter 23 in mind.

The jeans have taken over. You put the scale away and found yourself trying on the same pair every morning, and the button became the number. This is the habit changing costume. The answer is the same. One pair, tried on once a week or not at all, and the other mornings the clothes chosen for the day and not as a

measurement. If you can't do that, it's a sign that the break needs to be a break from measuring, not from the scale, and chapter 20's list of slow measures is where to go.

When it's more than a habit

This book is about a habit, and a habit is something you can decide about. Some readers will recognise, in reading it, that the scale is part of something they can't decide their way out of, and this chapter is for them.

The NHS lists, among the signs of an eating disorder, spending a lot of time worrying about your weight and body shape, eating very little, making yourself sick or taking laxatives after eating, exercising too much, having very strict habits or routines around food, and changes in mood such as being withdrawn, anxious or depressed. If the number on the scale decides whether you eat that day, or how much, or what you must do afterwards, and if that's most days, then the scale isn't a habit in the sense this book means. It's part of a condition that has treatment. The NHS says to see a GP as soon as you can, and that with treatment most people recover. The charity Beat has a helpline and a website, and the NHS page links to both. Nothing in chapters 17 to 21 is a substitute for that, and I'd rather you closed the book here and rang someone than took the break as a cure.

The same goes in the other direction. If you've felt low most of the day, most days, for a fortnight or more, with the loss of interest and energy the NHS describes on its page about depression in adults, the scale may be one of the few things producing a reaction, and that isn't a reason to keep it. It's a reason to see a GP, and to let the mornings wait until you have.

Then there's the reader who's been asked to weigh daily by someone who knows why. The British Heart Foundation's page on heart failure says to weigh yourself regularly because a sudden gain can mean fluid building up that needs treating, and the NHS lists sudden weight gain among the signs to get urgent help for. In that case the daily number is exactly what this book says it usually isn't. It's a signal, read by someone trained to read it, and water is the point. Keep doing what you've been asked. The same applies in pregnancy and in any condition where a clinician has asked for a daily figure. If the number is still setting your mood, that's worth telling them, because they can help with how to read it. But the weighing continues.

And the reader who's begun to suspect that the scale is one of several things they check, count or recheck, and that the checking spreads. You've checked already, in this series, is about that habit and about where it shades into something a GP should hear about.

None of this is a diagnosis. It's the line where a book stops being the right tool, and I'd rather draw it clearly than pretend it isn't there.

When you got back on

It'll happen. A morning in the second week, or the third, when the fear from chapter 7 is loud and the cupboard is right there, and you get the scale out and step on, and the number does what it always did. Or a weigh day that turned into two, and then the week. Or, on the average, you looked. Here's what to make of it.

One morning on the scale isn't the habit back. Lally's volunteers from chapter 21 missed days and the habit formed anyway, and the same shape applies in reverse. A single step, on its own, is a single step. What turns it into the habit is the second morning, and the second morning is much more likely if you decide that the first one proves the month was pointless. It doesn't. It proves the habit is still there, which you knew, and that a specific morning got past your plan, which is information.

So look at the morning. What was it? A bad night, a big dinner, a comment from someone, a photograph, a pair of trousers.

Whatever it was, it's the trigger you hadn't planned for, and it goes into a when-then plan by tonight. When I've had a night like that, then the scale stays in the cupboard and I write down the fear instead of the number. That's the whole repair.

Then look at which belief walked you to the mat. It'll be one of the chapters. Usually it's chapter 7, the fear of losing control, and sometimes chapter 5, the wanting of a good morning after a careful day. Reread the one it was. Not the whole book. The one chapter, so that the argument is fresh at the point the habit found the gap.

What you don't do is settle up. The lapse doesn't earn a punishment any more than a bad morning did, and it certainly doesn't restart the four weeks from zero. The month continues from where it is. If you weighed on day eleven, day twelve is day twelve.

And if the number you saw when you got back on was a bad one, and the swing arrived in full, read chapter 3 once more before breakfast. It was water. It was always water. The fact that you felt it anyway is chapter 11, and you're not weak for that. You're a person who read a number about their body, which is what the number is for.

If you find that you're back on every morning and have been for a fortnight, that's not a lapse. That's the habit, and the decision in chapter 21 is there to be made again, possibly with a different option this time. Readers who couldn't hold the weigh day often find the break easier, because a cupboard is a simpler rule than a calendar.

Ten past seven, the kettle

You're up. You've been to the bathroom. The mat is where it always was, and the flat white square isn't on it, or it is, and it's Thursday, and you'll step on it once in a minute and write a number under three others. Either way, the thing that used to happen in the second after the number settled doesn't happen, because there's no number, or because the number is one of a set and a set can't swing you.

You go and put the kettle on. It's an ordinary Tuesday. You had a curry on Saturday and you've no idea what it did to anything, and it turns out you don't need to. The jeans on the chair are the jeans you're wearing today because they're the jeans, not because a reading of your water said so. Breakfast happens because it's morning. Whoever's next in the bathroom gets an ordinary good morning and doesn't know why it's a better one than it used to be.

If you're on the weigh day, in a month or two you'll have a column of numbers, and it'll tell you something a thousand mornings never did, which is where you're actually going. Most weeks it'll say nowhere in particular, and that will turn out to be fine. If it ever says something else, it'll say it clearly and in time, and you'll decide what to do with the knowledge, as a person with a line and not a person with a mood.

If you took the break, somewhere in the fourth week you'll notice that you can't remember the last number. That's not carelessness. That's what it feels like when an instrument goes back to being an instrument.

The scale was never lying to you. It was telling you the truth about the wrong thing, every morning, in a voice you couldn't help hearing. You've stopped asking it the question it couldn't answer. That's the whole change, and it's enough.

One action, before tomorrow. Choose. The weigh day, the average or the break. Then either pick the day and put the notebook by the scale, or put the scale in the cupboard, tonight, without a last reading. The kettle can do the rest.

Notes

These notes give the sources behind the claims in each chapter, and say where I'm giving my own interpretation. The book isn't medical advice. If a doctor or nurse has asked you to weigh yourself daily, keep doing so, and if your relationship with food or your weight is causing you distress, your GP is the person to see. The examples throughout, the jeans on the chair, the curry on Saturday, the partner who says the number out loud, the scale that reports body fat, the teenager on the landing, are invented to illustrate and aren't drawn from real people.

Studies were checked on 26 September 2026 by reading their published abstracts, and two by their Crossref records. None was read in full, and none carried a retraction notice at that date.

Where a paper is cross-sectional it describes an association at one point in time and can't show what causes what, and I've tried to say so each time. Two of the studies cited, Orsama 2014 and Helander 2014, have Brian Wansink as a co-author. Several of his own later papers were retracted for data problems. These two are analyses of a Finnish dataset led by other authors and carry no notice, and I've used them only for the shape of the week and for one sentence on breaks in weighing.

Chapter 1. No sources. The terms are the book's own.

Chapter 3. Kreitzman, Coxon and Szaz, "Glycogen storage: illusions of easy weight loss, excessive weight regain, and distortions in estimates of body composition", *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 56, 1992, pages 292S to 293S. A short paper on very low

calorie diets, with eleven subjects. The extension to ordinary eating is mine. Kanellakis and colleagues, "Changes in body weight and body composition during the menstrual cycle", *American Journal of Human Biology* 35, 2023, e23951. 42 women measured twice a week. Bunt, Lohman and Boileau, "Impact of total body water fluctuations on estimation of body fat from body density", *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* 21, 1989, pages 96 to 100. Seven women selected because they reported large swings, so not typical. The claims about salt, gut contents and time of day are general physiology and I've given no figures for them.

Chapter 4. Kreitzman and colleagues, as above. Orsama and colleagues, "Weight rhythms: weight increases during weekends and decreases during weekdays", *Obesity Facts* 7, 2014, pages 36 to 47. 80 adults, 4,657 daily weights, retrospective. The remark about a Monday reading is mine.

Chapter 5. Steinberg, Bennett, Askew and Tate, "Weighing every day matters: daily weighing improves weight loss and adoption of weight control behaviors", *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 115, 2015, pages 511 to 518. 47 adults in the intervention arm of a six-month trial, a secondary analysis. Two letters were published about it in the same journal in 2016 and I haven't read them. The claim that the good morning is as unearned as the bad is mine.

Chapter 6. Zheng and colleagues, "Self-weighing in weight management: a systematic literature review", *Obesity* 23, 2015, pages 256 to 265. 17 longitudinal studies of adults seeking weight-loss treatment. Wing, Tate, Gorin, Raynor and Fava, "A self-regulation program for maintenance of weight loss", *New England*

Journal of Medicine 355, 2006, pages 1563 to 1571. 314 participants over 18 months. Pacanowski and Levitsky, "Frequent self-weighing and visual feedback for weight loss in overweight adults", Journal of Obesity 2015, 763680. 162 adults over two years. Madigan, Daley, Lewis, Aveyard and Jolly, "Is self-weighing an effective tool for weight loss: a systematic literature review and meta-analysis", International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity 12, 2015, article 104. An erratum was published in the same journal in 2016 and I haven't read it. The claim that honesty lives in the response is mine.

Chapter 7. Helander, Vuorinen, Wansink and Korhonen, "Are breaks in daily self-weighing associated with weight gain?", PLoS One 9, 2014, e113164. 40 people, 2,838 weights. Madigan and colleagues, as above. The alarm and brake distinction is mine. The earlier book referred to is Breakfast isn't the problem.

Chapter 8. No research sources. The tide comparison and the account of signal and noise are mine.

Chapter 9. Quick, Larson, Eisenberg, Hannan and Neumark-Sztainer, "Self-weighing behaviors in young adults: tipping the scale toward unhealthy eating behaviors?", Journal of Adolescent Health 51, 2012, pages 468 to 474. 2,287 young adults, cross-sectional. Neumark-Sztainer, van den Berg, Hannan and Story, "Self-weighing in adolescents: helpful or harmful? Longitudinal associations with body weight changes and disordered eating", Journal of Adolescent Health 39, 2006, pages 811 to 818. 2,516 adolescents over five years. The description of the skipped

breakfast and the four o'clock is my observation. The earlier books referred to are Eat when you're hungry, The feeling will pass without help and Breakfast isn't the problem.

Chapter 10. Quick and colleagues, as above. Pacanowski, Linde and Neumark-Sztainer, "Self-weighing: helpful or harmful for psychological well-being? A review of the literature", Current Obesity Reports 4, 2015, pages 65 to 72. Twenty papers. Klos, Esser and Kessler, "To weigh or not to weigh: the relationship between self-weighing behavior and body image among adults", Body Image 9, 2012, pages 551 to 554. 268 students. The claim about which group the reader is in is mine.

Chapter 11. Ogden and Evans, "The problem with weighing: effects on mood, self-esteem and body image", International Journal of Obesity 20, 1996, pages 272 to 277. 74 people of normal weight, experimental. PubMed gives initials only for both authors, so surnames are used. The extension from clinics to bathrooms is mine.

Chapter 12. Pacanowski, Loth, Hannan, Linde and Neumark-Sztainer, "Self-weighing throughout adolescence and young adulthood: implications for well-being", Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior 47, 2015, pages 506 to 515. 1,868 people over ten years, three time points. The earlier book referred to is You wouldn't say it to a friend.

Chapter 13. No research sources. The account of why two readings differ is general and I've given no figures. The earlier book referred to is You've checked already.

Chapter 14. No research sources. The costs are my observations. Pacanowski 2015, as in chapter 12, for the longer view.

Chapter 15. Madigan and colleagues, Orsama and colleagues, and Neumark-Sztainer and colleagues, as above. The whole chapter's argument is my interpretation and is said to be.

Chapter 16. Orsama and colleagues, as above. The four-week figure is my judgement.

Chapter 17. No research sources. Madigan and colleagues for the daily against weekly finding, as above.

Chapter 18. Orsama and colleagues for avoiding Monday. What to expect is my expectation.

Chapter 19. No research sources. What to expect is my expectation.

Chapter 20. The NHS page on overweight and obesity in adults, at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September 2026, for BMI not distinguishing muscle from fat and for the waist to height ratio.

Chapter 21. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119. Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts and Wardle, "How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world", *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40, 2010, pages 998 to 1009. 96 volunteers, 82 with usable data. The rule hasn't been tested as a package.

Chapter 22. Madigan and colleagues, as above. Neumark-Sztainer and colleagues 2006, as above. The NHS page on overweight and obesity, as above, for the statement that losing a small proportion of weight can improve health. The account of how body fat scales work is general and I've given no figures. The NHS eating disorders page, as in chapter 23.

Chapter 23. The NHS pages on eating disorders and on the symptoms of depression in adults, at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September 2026. The British Heart Foundation page on heart failure, at [bhf.org.uk](https://www.bhf.org.uk), and the NHS page on heart failure, read the same day. The earlier book referred to is *You've checked already*. No claim is made about the effectiveness of any service.

Chapter 24. Lally and colleagues, as above. The extension from a missed day to a morning back on the scale is mine.

Looked up and not used. Ogden and Whyman, "The effect of repeated weighing on psychological state", *European Eating Disorders Review* 5, 1997, would have been the natural source for chapter 11 but no abstract was available to me and it isn't cited. Mercurio and Rima, "Watching my weight", *Sex Roles* 2011, on self-weighing and body surveillance in women, likewise. Bertz, Pacanowski and Levitsky 2015 found daily weighing with feedback prevented weight gain in first-year students, and Gokee-Larose, Gorin and Wing 2009 found daily weighing in 40 young adults on a programme wasn't associated with adverse psychological change, both consistent with chapter 6 and left out for space. I looked for a study giving a plain day-to-day weight range for ordinary adults and didn't find one I could read, so the book says "mostly noise" without a figure.