

## Scales: *A Guide for Equipment Selection*

Purchasing a quality scale is not an easy task. You want to get the best product for your money without breaking the bank. This guide provides tips for purchasing scales for measuring both body weight and body fat.

### **Standard Scales for Weight**

When purchasing a scale, there are many varieties to choose from. You might weigh a different amount when you go to the doctor than when you weigh at home on your own scale. If it is only about 2 to 3 pounds different, don't worry too much about it. This could simply be due to the variation in scales. Your weight will also fluctuate depending on the time of day, how long it has been since you've eaten and how hydrated you are. If you notice that the variations are closer to 5 to 10 pounds, you might want to look at calibrating your scale at home or investing in a new one.

There are basically two types of scales for measuring weight that can be found at your local department store. There are dial scales and digital scales. Before you shop, begin to think about the type of scale you want. Below are some tips to help you decide.

#### ❖ **Dial Scales**

##### *The Pros:*

- Typically less expensive.
- Found in most department stores.
- Often have a knob for easy calibration.

##### *The Cons:*

- Sometimes difficult to read the weight when looking down from a standing position.

In summary: for dial scales, if you are looking for something that is easy to find and inexpensive, this might be the right scale. However, if you have difficulty seeing small numbers from far away, a digital scale might be a better choice.

#### ❖ **Digital Scales**

##### *The Pros:*

- Large displays are easy to read when looking down from a standing position.
- Some measure to the tenth of a pound.
- Advanced versions allow you to save information within the scale to track progress.

##### *The Cons:*

- Some are difficult to use or program.

- They operate by battery; often if the battery is running low the scale will give you an inaccurate weight for a period of time before the battery completely runs out. However, some models now come with Lithium batteries that need to be replaced less often, if at all.

In summary: with digital scales, the less expensive versions can provide an easy-to-program tool that also allows easier view of the weight reading. If you find it easy to understand and operate new technology, a slightly more expensive digital scale with features such as a save option might be better for you.

Besides the option of dial or digital type, you have probably noticed that scales have gone a little bit “designer.” Some are made with chrome accents or made of glass. Keep in mind that most of these options are just cosmetic. Companies try to appeal to the customer in the way the scale looks. For example, a customer might be more likely to buy it if it matches a bathroom décor.

The number one tip for scale shopping is READ! Read the box to determine instructions and how difficult the model might be to use.

When it comes to scales, spending more doesn’t always mean you are getting a better product. Often more expensive scales have more technology that may be complicated to operate. If you aren’t one who enjoys working with technology, a less expensive scale may be what you are looking for. Spending approximately \$20 to \$40 for a scale for home use would be adequate. This covers the scale that is very simple to operate as well as some that have a little more advanced technology.

If the scale is for an educational program, it might undergo more frequent use. You might want to look for a scale from a medical supply company. These companies often have heavy-duty scales made for repeated use. These types of models usually range from \$50-\$80.

**Questions you might ask about the scale you are purchasing:**

- Is the digital readout or the dial easy to see?
- Is the weight limit appropriate for everyone who will be using it?
- Can it be used on the carpet or must it be used on a flat, hard surface like tile?
- Will you be moving the scale often? If so, look for a scale that is light weight and easy to move.
- Does it use a battery to operate? If so, what type and how expensive is the battery to replace?
- Does it have a warranty? Look for warranties of at least a year, preferably longer.

Deciding what type of scale is appropriate for you makes it easier to shop. You’ll probably encounter all types and varieties once in the store. Read the boxes to find out what is involved with operating each type. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. Store employees can give you great feedback, such as if a certain model sells well or if one model has been returned often due to problems. If you have access to the Internet, use it for research. If you go to the store and decide on a few models you like but are afraid you might be spending too much for something that might not be right for you, look up the model on the Internet. You may find product reviews or customer testimonies that can help you make a decision.

**Body Fat Scales**

Body fat scales, or analyzers, are a popular item. These scales estimate the percentage of body fat through a process called Bioelectrical Impedance Analysis (BIA). This means that the scale sends a harmless electrical current through the lower body that measures body water. This electrical current will travel more quickly through the muscle (because of its water content) than it will through fat. Once the

current has been sent through the body, the scale can convert the information it has gathered from this process into a number that represents your percent body fat.

There is both good news and bad news when it comes to body fat scales. The bad news is that generally, body fat scales are not very accurate. This means that the scale might show a person is 25% body fat, and this may not be true. Body fat could be lower or higher.

The good news is that the scale can measure progress. For example, if the scale finds a person to be 25% body fat and a few months later a measurement shows the person is 22% body fat, you know progress has been made. You might not know if those numbers are accurate, but you do know that there has been a decrease in body fat by approximately 3%.

The best way to get an accurate body fat measurement is to consult a fitness professional or ask a health care provider for help. There are many ways to measure body fat, and some are offered at local fitness centers. When deciding whether to purchase a body fat scale, you might find that it is more cost effective to pay to have body fat measured every few months by a professional than invest in a body fat scale.

Keep in mind that most often the only accurate information a body fat scale will give you is weight and sometimes BMI. Weight can be assessed by a less expensive standard scale, and BMI can be figured by your health care provider or by using a Web-based tool like the one available from the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. It can be found online at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/calc-bmi.htm>

If you do decide you'd like to purchase a body fat scale, remember that these scales are high on technology and might be difficult to operate. Be sure to read any information on the box carefully and ask questions about the model you are considering. Some body fat scales will store information for several users and also provide modes you can select such as *athlete*. Some require you to input information like gender, height, and age each time you use them. Be sure to seek out a model with a long warranty. Some models offer a warranty for 10 years or more.

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