



THE COMPLETE PROGRESS TRACKING GUIDE

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WELCOME

Hey! Welcome to your Complete Guide to Progress Tracking. I'm happy to know you're giving this a read.

My hope for you in reading this is that you would have a newfound level of awareness around your progress tracking and how it plays into your overall results, that way you can get the absolute most out of your efforts.

Enjoy!

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROGRESS TRACKING

In my nine years of coaching, I've been lucky enough to work with hundreds of individuals as they pursue their greatest state of health and fitness. Before an individual becomes a client that is working with me, they are a prospective client that is trying to figure out how to reach their goals on their own.

I've had conversations with many different people. I've talked with people that need help figuring out how to optimize the last 10% of their efforts to get into the best shape of their entire life, and I've talked with people that need to figure out how to consistently make the first initial changes in their health and fitness journey.

No matter where the individual is, there are things that need to be monitored. Nutrition, training, and progress are all things that should be monitored.

After all, what is monitored can be managed.

Having an accurate idea as to how your nutrition, training, and progress tracking are impacting your results is of paramount importance along your health and fitness journey. Without an accurate understanding of the truth (the truth of how you eat, train, and live your life), you are playing a guessing game with your health, fitness, and results.

In my opinion, those things are far too valuable to play a guessing game with. You'll get a more accurate idea of your food intake if you track it accurately, rather than guess. You'll get a more accurate idea of your performance if you track your workouts accurately, rather than guess. The same goes for your progress.

WHERE MOST DROP THE BALL

The thing is, accurate progress tracking is one of the most overlooked aspects of a health and fitness journey. Without accurate progress tracking, we truly don't have a good idea as to how our body is or isn't responding to the training, nutrition, and lifestyle changes we are giving it.

In this world, there are lies, and there is truth. The closer we get to truth, the better off we are. Same goes for your fitness. The closer you are to the truth, the more you'll be able to improve your results. When we listen to lies, we make decisions that may not help us.

So, how do we get closer to the truth when it comes to tracking progress?

HOW TO TRACK PROGRESS ACCURATELY

I would imagine that most of you reading this guide are interested in changing the composition of your body. A majority of the time, that means losing fat, building muscle, or both. So, for that reason, I will be discussing how to track progress accurately for body composition changes such as fat loss and/or building muscle.

THE SCALE

The scale is the most common tool people use to track their progress, as most individuals want to gain or lose weight, and the scale is a convenient and easy way to do that.

However, the scale has received a lot of backlash in recent years. Frankly, it's unnecessary. A scale is simply a tool. That's it. Both your mindset with the tool and the way in which you use the tool will determine the impact that the use of that tool has.

Think of it this way. Knives aren't inherently bad. They are tools, however, people with bad intentions and unhealthy relationships with knives can use knives as tools for bad things. Similarly, the scale can be used in the same manner. Perhaps not to harm others, but to harm your headspace and your progress.

It's important to understand how the scale works before diving into how to use it properly. I'm sure you're sitting there thinking "I know how a scale works, dude." I'm sure you do, but I want to check your relationship with the number before going further.

The scale reflects one number. And that number is a representation of your body in relation to gravity. It's the total weight of your body (and whatever clothes you may have on). The weight of your body is composed of many different things:

- Fat tissue
- Muscle tissue
- Organ tissue
- Water
- Urine
- Waste
- Bone
- And more

So, if the scale weight reflects the combined weight of all those things, why do you treat a gain as only a gain in body fat, and a loss as only a loss in body fat? It's because you haven't been using the scale properly.

HOW TO USE THE SCALE PROPERLY

Because the scale weight is a combination of the weight of all those different things, there are going to be a lot of daily fluctuations in that total scale weight. Drink a glass of water, scale goes up. Go to the restroom, scale goes down. Sweat a bit, scale goes down, have more sodium in your diet, scale goes up.

As you can see, most of the fluctuations we see in scale weight come from water, urine, and waste. So, it does us no good to treat those fluctuations as fat gain, when 95% of the time they're to do with water, urine, and waste.

To get a better understanding of what may be fat gain or fat loss, we need to find a way to factor out those daily fluctuations.

This is where average weigh-ins come in. This is what I have all my clients do that use a scale at home to measure progress.

Weigh yourself in the morning, after using the restroom, and before eating/drinking at least five days in the week (ideally every day of the week). Record those weights. You can use a dry erase marker on your mirror, a notepad, or the notes app in your phone to keep track of the daily weights. After 5-7 weigh-ins, calculate the average weight. Over time, you will compare one week's average to the next, and so on. This will help you factor out water and waste fluctuations and look at the trend over time rather than day-to-day.

If you see the average trend down after 3-4 weeks, you may be losing fat. You could be losing muscle, too. But if you're strength training and meeting your protein needs, that's highly unlikely. If you see the average trend up after 3-4 weeks, you may be gaining fat and/or muscle (though putting on muscle takes quite a long time). It's important that you look at the trend over the course of at least three weeks before making a decision to adjust your diet, workouts, or lifestyle. Even weekly averages can have spikes and drops from one week to the next that don't represent the overall trend. This is especially true for women on their cycle. For women, it may be beneficial to compare average weights not only week to week, but cycle to cycle.

I want to note that there is a reason you should weigh yourself in the morning, after using the restroom, before eating and drinking. Not only will that help factor out waste, it's also one of the easiest ways to make sure you're weighing in a repeatable environment. If you're weighing yourself in the afternoon or at night, it's nearly impossible to make sure you're weighing yourself in the exact same conditions each day.

If you begin to assess the trend of your average weigh-ins over the course of a few weeks, you will have a much better grasp of how your body is responding to your training, nutrition and lifestyle changes (given you've been consistent with them). However, the scale still doesn't tell you the exact weight of each part of your body. This is where body composition tests come in.

BODY COMPOSITION TESTING

A body composition test is the best way to understand how the fat and muscle in your body is changing. If you're using an accurate testing method and doing it in a repeatable environment, a good test will be able to tell you how much bone, muscle, and fat you have, and how those are changing over time.

There are many different ways to get your body composition tested, some of which are more accurate than others. One of the best ways to get your body composition tested is through a DEXA scan. Though they are harder to come by, and often cost more. But, they are extremely accurate. An easy way to find one is simply by doing a Google search for DEXA scans near you.

Other methods are available as well. One of my favorites is bioelectrical impedance. This is the most common method of body composition testing you will find. This is what's used for home body composition scales, and many commercially available tests you'll find. One of the most pop-

ular is the InBody scan. This is what a large majority of my clients use. It's easy, inexpensive, and much easier to find than a DEXA scan.

The only downside is they aren't as accurate or comprehensive as DEXA scans. Thankfully, extreme accuracy doesn't matter too much. I'll tell you why. Though it's nice to use a test that is very accurate, it's more important for you to use a test that is very consistent. After all, you're not looking for the exact number from a test-by-test basis, you're looking for the trend and change over time, just like the average scale weights.

Let's say that in reality, 30% of your body is fat. However, the test says you have 32% body fat. A month later, you're 28% body fat in reality, but the test says you have 30% body fat. Though the test may not be the most accurate number at that time, we're still seeing a 2% change, and the change over time is what we're paying attention to.

Because of this, I wouldn't overthink the type of machine you're going to use. I would look for a DEXA scan first and use that if it's an option for you. If not, an InBody scan is totally fine. Other options include 3D body scanners like Styku, and hydrostatic weighing.

Regardless of the method you use, it's important that you're testing in the same environment at the same time of day. Preferably first thing in the morning, before eating/drinking and after using the restroom because this is the most easily repeatable.

As far as frequency goes, it's up to you. I would recommend getting a body composition test anywhere from every 2-4 weeks. Most of my clients get their composition tested monthly.

If you have a body composition test at home as well, you could use the same method above with the scale weight. Take a look at averages with body fat and muscle tissue over a period of time.

PROGRESS PHOTOS

Taking regular progress photos is another great way to visually see progress over time.

You see yourself in the mirror every single day. Because of that, it can be harder to notice the changes your body is experiencing. I've had a lot of clients report back that they don't notice a lot of change, but every time they see friends and family, they get compliments on how much of a difference they see.

Taking photos is a great way to put yourself in the shoes of others and see how your body is visually changing over time.

Just like the other methods of progress tracking (scale weights and body composition), it's important that photos are taken in an easily repeatable environment (first thing in the morning, after using the restroom, before eating/drinking).

People often like to take the progress photos themselves, but I feel that it can skew things. Rather than using your hand to hold the phone or camera, either have someone else take the photos, or set the device on a timer.

It's important that you take your photos in good lighting. Good lighting will allow you to see every part of your body, and will not leave room for doubt when questioning if you are or aren't seeing changes to your training and nutrition protocols. Do your best to have light coming towards your body (whether from natural light or a ring light). Try not to have light coming from the ceiling

only. This will create shadows and inconsistencies that make it challenging to see where your body is changing. Having three photos (front, side, and back) in a relaxed standing position can help you get a full view of your body and see what changes may be happening in certain places over others. For example, you may see change in the back of your arms before the stubborn fat in your midsection.

What should you wear when taking photos? Well, it's entirely up to you. My female clients will wear bikinis or workout shorts with sport bras, and my male clients will usually wear boxer briefs or shorts. They're your photos, so do what you please. Though it may be scary to take photos with less clothes on, it may just be the uncomfortable reality check you need to make the changes you've always wanted.

In regards to frequency, it's up to you as well. I have my clients take photos either bi-weekly or monthly. An important thing to consider here is the psychological component as well. You're likely not going to see much change over the course of two weeks, but if you know you need to take photos every two weeks, you may be more consistent with your training and nutrition protocols, which will lead to greater results.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Though you're not obligated to, I recommend you use all of the above progress tracking methods to get the best idea of how your body is responding to your nutrition, training, and lifestyle changes.

Remember, no matter what methods you use, make sure you're testing in the same, easily repeatable environment each time for the most consistent readings.

Whether you're trying to lose the last 5 pounds, or lose the 50 pounds you've gained over the years, take your progress tracking seriously. It gives you the feedback you need to make informed changes in order to keep you progressing towards your goal.

If you have any questions on progress tracking, feel free to shoot me a message on IG (@adampoehlmann_pt) or an email (adam@poehlmannfitness.com).

And don't forget, frustrated individuals over 25 come to me to stop spinning their wheels and finally get the results they deserve. If you've been spinning your wheels, and you're frustrated because you're not seeing the results you feel you should be, let's talk. Shoot me a message on IG with "frustrated" to get started.

Thanks for reading!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Adam Poehlmann is a fitness and nutrition coach based in Fort Worth, TX. After hanging up the baseball cleats, he found a strong interest in the human body and how it performs. Since then, Adam has been transforming lives through fitness and nutrition in a fun and encouraging atmosphere. You can learn more about Adam and what it's like to work with him [here](#).

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