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The Mirror

What’s the reason for looking in the mirror before you leave the house in the morning? How is your driving speed usually affected by looking at the speedometer? Why do dance studios typically have mirrored walls? What purpose is there for weighing oneself?

All of these situations involve getting information or feedback that can be used to alter one’s behavior. Awareness is the first step in changing behavior. Feedback typically serves no purpose unless there is potential to continue or change one’s behavior.

Self-monitoring is a strategy that is often used to help people change health behaviors (e.g., quit smoking, increase exercise, modify diet, etc.). Keeping food diaries is commonly included in behavioral approaches to weight management, and wearing pedometers is frequently a component of programs to increase walking. Self-monitoring works... or more accurately, it helps! Monitoring behavior tends to change behavior in the desired direction.

There are, however, a number of reasons why self-monitoring isn’t a perfect solution to having healthy behaviors. Self-monitoring is often done inconsistently or simply not continued. Also, there are times when self-awareness can paradoxically lead persons to behave in an unhealthy manner (i.e., not liking what one sees about oneself triggers bad feelings which in turn weaken self-control). Most importantly,

awareness of one's behavior is only one of the numerous factors that affect our behavior.

In spite of these caveats, self-monitoring can be an excellent place to start when there is a health behavior that one wants to modify. It can be as simple as keeping a diary or record of the behavior and use that information to guide future behavior.

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