

High-tech scales have more add-ons than ever before

by R.J. Ignelzi

Bathroom scales are getting heavy on technology and style.

Gadgetry galore along with sleek chrome and glass designs are transforming the old bathroom box into a decor-smart item for any health-savvy home.

WEIGHTS & MEASURES - These high-tech scales have more add-ons than ever, Seen here is Professional Raised-Dial Scale by Tanita, \$79.99; the Lifestyle Manager by Xavix, \$149.99; the Comfort F5 Body Balance Scale by Soehnle, \$130; and the Ironman Segmental Body Composition Monitor (model BC558) by Tanita, \$299.99. CNS Photos. While just about any scale will tell you your weight, the bells and whistles offered on some models add a whole new dimension to the morning weigh-in.

In addition to giving your body weight, the newest scales (sometimes preferring the moniker "body composition monitors") will analyze your muscle mass, body water weight and visceral (abdominal) fat.

Some track your weight-loss progress (or lack of) and remind you how far you have to go until you reach your goal weight. Others even give you a virtual pat on the back and offer personalized health recommendations. If only you could get the thing to brew you up a low-fat latte.

Scales are getting smarter, thanks to a technology called bioelectrical impedance analysis, which sends

low-intensity electrical currents you can't feel from your feet through your body. Body-fat measurements are based on how fast the current travels through you, because it takes longer for electricity to flow through fat than muscle.

Not to worry, weighty Luddites, not all scales require an IT degree. While the digital models are the most popular and, according to weight-loss experts, the most accurate, there are still some analog versions with giant speedometer-type dials.

From timeless to tech toys, we weigh in on some of today's most interesting scales:

Lifestyle Manager by Xavix: \$149.99 (plus \$80 for Xavixport).

More than a scale, the Lifestyle Manager is healthy entertainment.

Designed by video game developer Xavix, the scale uses radio frequency technology to wirelessly communicate with the Xavixport set-top box, which is plugged into a television. Step onto the Xavix scale and watch as the data is transmitted, updated, analyzed and stored.

Using accompanying software, the scale not only measures weight, but also tracks body fat and body mass and then analyzes the data in charts and graphs displayed on your TV. It even offers exercise and stretching guidance and words of encouragement.

Available at www.xavixstore.com

Comfort F5 Body Balance Scale by Soehnle: \$130.

Get up close and personal with your scale's readout and analysis. The Comfort F5 features a cleverly designed portable radio-controlled LCD display that can be removed from the scale platform and perched on a counter or mounted to a wall at eye level. No more squinting or hunching over to see the numbers at your feet. When not standing on the scale, the portable display functions as a clock. In addition to measuring weight, this scale tracks muscle mass, fat and water weight in ratio to your age, height and gender. It also offers some kind words of advice, such as "drink more water" or "build more muscle" to obtain optimum fitness.

Available through www.soehnleusa.com

Weight Watchers Scale (model WW71) by Conair: \$60.

Stepping on this snazzy-looking glass and chrome scale is almost like attending a WeightWatchers meeting. It displays your weight on a big 1.9-inch display and tracks it over time. It shows changes from your last weigh-in, changes from your starting weight and how many pounds you have to go until you reach your goal weight. In addition to weight, this model also tells you your percentage of body fat, bone mass and body water and calculates your body mass index, or BMI.

For more information, www.conair.com

Ironman Segmental Body Composition Monitor (model BC558) by Tanita: \$299.99.

Jocks or jockettes who are trying to perfect their buff bods might be the only ones interested in knowing everything this scale has to say.

This ultra-high-tech model uses retractable handgrip electrodes to measure upper-body mass and strength, along with the standard feet electrodes to give you total body weight and segmental weight of your lower body. This means you'll not only find out your total body weight and muscle mass, but you'll also be given the weight and mass of each arm and leg and your trunk.

This is supposed to be especially useful information for anyone trying to build or rehabilitate a particular part of the body.

After a few seconds on the scale, you'll end up with a complete body composition profile, including weight, body fat percentage (total and segmental), body water percentage, muscle mass (total and segmental), bone mass, visceral (abdominal) fat, metabolic age and physique rating.

Available through www.thecompetitiveedge.com.

Phoenix Talking Bathroom Scales by My Weigh: (\$45 for the 330-pound weight capacity; \$60 for bariatric model XL-550 with 550-pound weight capacity).

Hearing your weight doesn't necessarily make it any easier to take, but it can be more convenient, especially if you haven't popped your contacts in yet. After you step on the scale, a pleasant-sounding female voice greets you and announces your poundage. If you just can't bear to hear the news, it can be hushed with the push of a button. But your weight will still appear on the LCD display for about 10 seconds.

For more information, www.myweigh.com.

Tri-Fitness Health Station (model SC-560) by Homedics: \$89.99.

Not only does this scale give you a detailed analysis of your weight, including body fat percentage, body water percentage, muscle mass and bone mass, but it also tells you how many calories you should be eating. The scale's Calorie Predictor forecasts your calorie needs based on your current weight and your ideal weight. Now, if it could only prepare the food and serve it to you.

The Tri-Fitness Health Station also features an "athlete mode," to help measure lean, fit folks more accurately.

For more information, www.homedics.com

Professional Raised-Dial Scale by Tanita: \$79.99.

For some people, the more simple the styling the better. Especially when it comes to a bathroom scale. This classic model accommodates 400 pounds and features a white porcelain platform with a large, round analog dial that's raised for easy reading.

Available at Sharper Image stores, www.sharperimage.com.

MEASURING UP

How to choose the right scale:

- Find a scale that can weigh you. "You need to measure your full weight, so make sure the scale has the right weight capacity for you," says Dr. Michael W. Lee of Scripps Clinic's Lee Center for Weight Management in San Diego.

- The display should be large enough to see.

- Ensure your scale is accurate. Test its accuracy with a dumbbell or 5-pound sack of sugar.

- If you have a pacemaker, don't use scales that measure body fat or muscle mass; the scales' electrical current may interfere with the medical device.

- Weigh yourself at the same time of day and, to allow for inaccuracies, on the same scale.

- Wear minimal clothing and no shoes.

- Place scale on a hard surface, not carpet.

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