FACEGRABS RESEARCH BRIEF

The Case for the Week

Why Steady scores seven days instead of one, and what the evidence says about the alternative.

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Summary

Most activity tracking renders a verdict every midnight: the goal was met or it was not, the streak lives or it dies. The research base underneath human activity points the other way. The United States activity guidelines grade the week, not the day. Habit science finds that a single missed day does no measurable damage, while a missed week does. Streak research finds that the display itself, not the behavior behind it, decides whether people keep going after a break. Steady, a watch face for Garmin devices, is built on those findings. It scores a rolling seven days, forgives the light day, and saves its zero for a full week of nothing. This brief presents the evidence, the mechanism, and the cases, and it states plainly where the evidence stops.

1 The daily verdict

A conventional goal ring makes three quiet assumptions. It assumes the day is the natural unit of a training life. It assumes every day should clear the same bar. And it assumes a miss is information the wearer needs delivered at full weight, immediately, in red.

Real schedules honor none of that. Work runs in shifts and deadlines. Joints heal on their own calendar, not the watch's. A scoring system that treats each day as a separate trial will keep convicting people whose weeks are, by any honest measure, strong. The conviction is not harmless decoration. As the studies in the next section show, how a record is displayed changes what people do next, and a record built from daily verdicts manufactures a specific, well-documented failure: the day the streak breaks, the wearer stops.

None of this argues for softer standards. Steady's targets rise as fitness improves, and its ring reaches zero the same way fitness does, by a week of genuine inactivity. The argument is about the unit of account. Grade the week, and the score starts describing the life it claims to measure.

2 What the evidence says

Public health already grades the week

The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and summarized in JAMA, prescribe 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity

activity, or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous activity, per week.[1] No daily quota appears in the guidance. The unit chosen by a major evidence review in the field is the week, because that is the span over which real lives can arrange it.

A missed day does not break a habit. A missed week might.

In the University College London habit-formation study, 96 volunteers repeated a chosen behavior daily for 12 weeks while researchers modeled how automatic it became.[2] Two findings matter here. First, missing one opportunity to perform the behavior "did not materially affect the habit formation process." Second, the authors caution that missing a week's worth of opportunities does hinder it. Read together, the study sketches a forgiveness curve: days are cheap to lose, weeks are not. A tracker that zeroes a day and a tracker that zeroes a week are making opposite claims about that curve, and only one of them matches the data.

The display is an intervention

Silverman and Barasch examined what happens when trackers highlight streaks, across seven studies published in the Journal of Consumer Research.[3] People whose logs showed an intact streak were more likely to engage in the behavior afterward than people whose logs showed a broken one, even when the underlying behavior was identical. The effect grew stronger when people blamed themselves for the break. The scoreboard is not a neutral window onto behavior. It is a force acting on it, and a broken-streak display pushes in the direction of quitting.

All-or-nothing scoring invites total collapse

Psychologists Herman and Polivy documented the pattern in dieters decades before fitness trackers existed: people who believed they had already broken their diet for the day went on to eat more, not less.[4] They called it the "what-the-hell effect." A rule framed as pass or fail leaves nothing to protect once it is failed. Daily goal rings are that framing, worn on the wrist, reset every midnight whether the wearer is ready or not.

Weeks are how people restart

Dai, Milkman, and Riis showed in Management Science that goal pursuit surges after temporal landmarks, and that the start of a new week is one of the reliable ones.[5] People already think in weeks when they begin again. A rolling weekly score works with that rhythm continuously, instead of demanding a fresh start every 24 hours.

3 The mechanism, in numbers

Steady shows one ring. Three measures feed it: steps, active minutes, and active calories, drawn as three arcs. Each measure is compared against the wearer's own rolling average of the last seven days, today included, and the measures trade off against one another, so a low-step day carried by real training minutes still registers as work. Targets are set from the wearer's fitness, estimated from VO2 max and resting heart rate, and they climb as fitness climbs. The bar is personal, and it is not allowed to get easier just because it was cleared last month.

The arithmetic of a rest day is the whole design in miniature. Take a wearer whose step target is 10,000 a day, who takes a planned rest day and walks 3,000.

Scoreboard	What the rest day scores	What happens to the record
Daily goal	3,000 of 10,000: 30%, a failed day	The streak ends. The week restarts from zero at midnight.
Steady	The 3,000-step day replaces a 10,000-step day in the seven-day window. The average moves to 9,000, and the ring reads 90%.	At midnight the oldest day leaves the window and takes only its share with it: one seventh. Nothing is erased.

The zero condition. Steady's ring reaches zero after seven consecutive days of no activity, and not before. That threshold is deliberate. It is set where the habit research says the damage actually begins, at the week, rather than where a calendar happens to turn a page.

Two consequences follow. First, effort is never confiscated: a hard Saturday still counts on Wednesday, fading gradually instead of expiring at midnight. Second, honesty is preserved. A wearer cannot coast on one enormous day forever, because the window keeps moving, and a wearer who truly stops will watch the ring drain across a week and know exactly what it means. Forgiveness with a memory is a different thing from a free pass, and the difference is arithmetic.

4 Case studies

The two cases below are illustrative scenarios, built from common schedules and the scoring rules described in this brief. They are not customers, and no statement in them is a testimonial. They exist to show what each scoreboard does with the same week.

The shift worker

A nurse works three twelve-hour shifts, then has four days to live her life. On shift days she is on her feet but rarely accumulates what a step goal calls exercise; her training happens on the off days, in two long sessions. Daily scoring fails her three days a week and kills her streak before the

weekend, every week, forever. Her weekly totals, meanwhile, exceed the federal guideline. On a rolling average, the heavy days bank credit the light days draw on, and the ring describes the job she actually has.

The plateau

Six months into training, a fixed 10,000-step goal that once stretched him now clears itself by lunch. The green checkmark has stopped meaning anything, and a reward that cannot be lost cannot motivate. Because Steady's targets are indexed to fitness, his bar has risen twice since spring, quietly, in step with his resting heart rate falling. The ring still asks something of him. A goal that cannot get harder is not a goal anymore; it is a souvenir.

5 The developer's own week

This case is not a scenario. Steady was designed by a lifter in his forties who trains four days a week and is working through a frozen shoulder. Some of those sessions are full training. Others, on the shoulder's orders, are rehab and mobility work: light, deliberate, and easy to mistake for rest if all you count is load.

Daily scoring mistook them regularly. A rehab day beside three hard days read as a 25% failure rate, and the streaks died on exactly the days the training plan was working as intended. The rolling week reads the same schedule correctly: four days of work at two intensities, averaged into a ring that stays high because the week stayed honest. The face exists because its author's own watch kept grading a good week as a broken promise. Anyone training around an injury, which is to say anyone who trains long enough, is living in this case.

6 The same flaw, upstream

Daily verdicts are not the only place fixed scoring misreads an athlete. Readiness scores apply one proprietary recipe to every wearer, weighting sleep, heart rate variability, and load the same for a swimmer and a powerlifter. FaceGrabs' second face, Output, answers with the opposite arrangement: the athlete chooses five metrics, weights them, and can hold the score up to the light to see what is driving it. The principle is the same one this brief defends: a score earns trust when its rules match the life, or the training, it claims to describe.

7 Limits of this brief

Three, stated plainly. The cited studies examine habits, streaks, goal pursuit, and activity guidelines. Steady is validating those findings in daily use, on real wrists and real schedules, and no clinical claim is made for the product. The cases in section 4 are scenarios, labeled as such, and the only first-person case is the developer's own. And a weekly score is a design choice with trade-offs: athletes who thrive on daily pressure exist, and nothing here argues they should surrender it. The

claim is narrower and harder to refute: the week is the unit the evidence supports, and a scoreboard built on it will keep more people training than one that executes their streak on an ordinary hard day.

References

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