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Breaking the Weight Loss Plateau

One frustrating aspect of weight loss is reaching a weight loss plateau. Thankfully, breaking the weight loss plateau is a relatively simple task once you know what causes it.

When we first undertake a weight loss goal we tend to lose a lot of weight initially then the amount slowly declines over a period of weeks or months until we reach the point where we stop losing weight altogether, and it's not that we don't need to lose more weight either. This is referred to as a weight loss plateau and it's probably the most frustrating aspect of any weight loss program. You know you're doing all the right things but you're just not losing the weight.

In the first week of your program you tend to lose the largest amount of weight. Much of the weight loss this first week is actually excess fluid and this constitutes as much as 9 lb (4 kg) or even more depending upon your starting weight. This fluid loss can represent as much as 50% of total weight lost in the first week.

There are several factors that contribute to a weight loss plateau including (but not limited to);

- Insufficient Calories Consumed
- Muscle Loss
- Weight Loss
- Lack Of Discipline
- Physical Adaptation
- Exercise Ability
- Over Exercise
- Enhanced Fitness Levels

Lets deal with these one at a time.

Insufficient Calories Consumed

The human body requires a MINIMUM of 1200 calories per day to function. If you consume less than that (on a crash diet for example), your body will interpret that as being in a famine and will reduce your metabolism (the bodies ability to burn calories) in order to protect itself and be able to survive for longer. This of course will stop it from burning fat stores.

Solution: Maintain a reasonable calorie consumption. Use a BMR (Basal Metabolic Rate) calculator to determine how many calories your body requires per day to maintain itself. You can find a BMR calculator on this post about [How many calories per day to lose weight](#). Once you have determined approximately how many calories your body requires to operate, reduce you calorie consumption to 500-700 calories less than that without going under 1200 calories. Any more than a 700 calorie deficit may lead to muscle loss which leads to the next cause of a weight loss plateau.

Muscle Loss

All bodily tissue requires energy to maintain itself, including fat. Muscle however, requires FIVE TIMES the amount of energy to maintain itself compared to fat. The higher the muscle percentage in your body the greater your caloric needs. Unfortunately, diets sometimes lead to muscle loss as well as fat loss, especially if a diet is not used in conjunction with some type of exercise program. You need to understand where your energy comes from, the primary source of energy for the body is carbohydrates, followed by protein then finally by fat. Your muscles are made of protein which is why you need protein to increase muscle mass. Unfortunately, if you lose muscle you need fewer calories.

Solution: Ensure that you consume enough protein in your diet. The primary source of protein is meat but that

also has a lot of fat so consume lean cuts of meat and supplement your protein intake with things like mushrooms, nuts and legumes and egg whites which are all high in protein. Combine that protein intake with some form of exercise to maintain muscle mass. If necessary, vitamin supplements may be utilized to ensure correct nutrition.

Weight Loss

Huh??? Isn't losing weight the whole point??? Yes it is! But as you lose weight so also the number of calories your body requires to maintain itself. As mentioned earlier, even fat needs calories to maintain itself (although at a rate of 20% what muscle uses).

Solution: As you lose weight, check your BMR regularly to see how many calories your body requires per day and maintain a calorie consumption around 500 calories less than that. But remember, don't consume less than 1200 calories. [Access a BMR calculator here.](#)

Lack Of Discipline

After several weeks of a new weight loss program many people tend to lose focus. They start indulging their cravings for unhealthy foods more than they should and they cut corners on exercise, skipping one day under the pretense of exercising twice as much the next day etc. This of course has the effect of decreasing the BMR and increasing their calorie intake making it more difficult to lose weight.

Solution: Staying motivated during a weight loss program can be a challenge. One of the best ways to overcome this issue is to find a weight loss buddy. The point is to have someone to exercise with and to be answerable to another person for our weight loss. Another great motivational tool can be found on our [Free Weight Loss Downloads](#) page. There is a free weight loss goal setting worksheet. You can print it out, fill it out and place it in a prominent place, perhaps on the fridge, where you will see it regularly and it will remind you of just what you are trying to achieve

Physical Adaptation

Our bodies adapt themselves to our calorie consumption and physical activity levels. When we begin an exercise regime, our body is required to make several changes to adjust to changing workloads. Our muscles have to rebuild themselves and this requires many calories. But, over time the body finishes adapting and burns less calories for the same activities.

Solution: Don't allow your body to adapt. Vary your exercise program by changing the intensity, duration, frequency and type of exercise. If you always do weights then go do some cardio, grab a jump rope and skip for 15 minutes. You can also utilize interval training where you swap and change between different types of exercise.

Exercise Ability

Whenever you do an exercise regularly you become better at it and your body requires less calories to perform it. A trained athlete will burn less calories playing their sport than someone who isn't trained in that sport.

Solution: As in the point above, don't allow your body to adapt to a single exercise. Mix it up, if you're always doing weights then go for a run, switch from the treadmill to a rowing machine etc.

Over Exercise

If you exercise too much your body adapts and reaches a point of where the extra energy consumed in exercise is offset by a similar DECREASE in the amount of energy used when not exercising. In other words, when you increase exercise intensity, your body decreases the number of calories consumed during the rest of your day.

Solution: Allow yourself recovery time. Take a break for a few days with some low impact exercise like swimming or tai chi. When you return to your normal exercise routine, pull back a little and only increase intensity when

needed to maintain weight loss.

Enhanced Fitness Levels

As your fitness level increases, your body efficiency increases and requires less calories to operate. Enhanced fitness causes a reduced resting metabolic rate and fewer calories required for normal daily activities. This is partially because your cardio-pulmonary efficiency is increased and your resting heart rate is lower.

Solution: Congratulations! You're officially fit and healthy. You can justifiably feel proud of yourself. Concentrate on mixing up your routine to maintain progress and life will just get better and better!

Another thing to keep in mind is that weight loss is not the only aspect to increasing your fitness. It is possible to lose inches without losing weight. This is because if you build muscle through resistance training that muscle weighs MORE than fat but takes up LESS space. So a person who weighs 200 lbs with 25% lean muscle will be smaller than another person of the same height and weight who only has 20% lean muscle.

So in summary there are four main things you need to remember:

1. Keep track of how many calories per day your body needs to maintain itself.
2. Maintain a calorie consumption of 500-700 less than your BMR without going below the 1200 minimum.
3. Engage in exercise to prevent muscle loss.
4. Mix up your exercise program to prevent your body from adapting.

Good luck breaking the weight loss plateau!

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You can also find this article published on [Breaking the Weight Loss Plateau](#), and on the tag pages [Weight Loss Tips](#).