

When Weight Loss Plateaus... Dr. Natasha Turner, N.D.

When we change our diet, cut our calories, or begin a fitness plan, we typically alter our energy expenditure balance by taking in fewer calories than we burn. At the beginning, this imbalance is beneficial for fat loss as the body taps into fat stores for fuel. But because our body prefers balance, it gradually adjusts by burning fewer calories in order to protect its reserves. This point is usually when our eating and exercise efforts stop producing the results we are looking for.

A weight loss plateau may occur because:

1. Your body simply needs a "rest" period to adapt to calorie-reduction.
2. Your current calorie intake may be in balance with your calorie expenditure.
3. You have reduced your calorie intake too much. Eating too few calories prompts your body to respond by slowing your metabolism to conserve calories.
4. During weight loss, water is generated in the body as a normal part of fat metabolism. This process can lead to water-related weight gain.
5. A hormonal imbalance is interfering with your body's ability to burn fat.
6. For women, weight fluctuations may be related to the menstrual cycle or water retention.

What can you do to break through?

The two most important steps are altering your eating habits and changing your exercise program in ways that challenge your body and shake things up. You must also evaluate your lifestyle (honestly) and any negative symptoms you may be experiencing to determine your sources of interference.

Here are a few ideas to help you power past a plateau:

1. Mix-up your workout. Fire up your metabolism (and calorie expenditure) by increasing your activity level. This simple step can "reboot" your metabolism and restart your weight loss. For example, if you usually exercise for 20 minutes each day, try 25-30 minutes daily. If you are already exercising for a sufficient length of time, increase the intensity. Longer workouts are not always the answer, but 150 minutes per week does seem to be the magic number that sparks weight loss, according to numerous studies.
2. Try cardio first-thing in the morning on an empty stomach. If you can manage it, try doing a 30-minute cardio workout (no longer!) first thing in the morning before breakfast. Why? In some cases, this technique may be just the trick your body needs to kick-start your metabolism.
3. Pump some iron. Remember, muscle is metabolically active tissue. Muscle mass determines the number of calories we burn daily while at rest. The more muscle we have, the more fat we can potentially burn, even while sitting around or sleeping.
4. Be sure to rest and recuperate. Recovery is an essential part of your exercise program. Proper rest allows your muscle fibres to grow and prevents the elevation of cortisol and other stress hormones that can happen when we over-train.
5. Make sure you are eating the right amounts at the right times. One of the biggest weight-loss mistakes is simply not eating enough calories or going too long without eating. Skipping breakfast is the worst habit of all! Plenty of research shows people who skip meals or slash too many calories are more obese and have increased risk for type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Eating the right foods frequently reassures your body that food is plentiful.
6. Keep a food diary. If you feel your nutrition is off track but can't figure out where you're going

wrong, try keeping a food journal. You may start to recognize dietary saboteurs, which can help you get back on track.

7. Ensure your weight loss expectations are realistic. Safe weight loss is one to two pounds of fat per week. During the first few weeks of a weight loss program, more weight may be lost, although most of it is water. After losing this initial weight, people tend to lose an average of one pound a week, which is still considered good progress (even a few pounds a month is good).

8. Drink plenty of water. As fat cells begin to shrink, they release toxins that need to be removed from our system by our liver, kidneys and digestive tract. If we don't take in enough water to support these processes, the toxins may interact with our hormones and cause increased fat storage or inability to burn fat. Water can also help make us feel full and regulate our appetite, as many of us mistake thirst for hunger.

To calculate how much water you need, multiply your body weight by 0.55. Divide the result by eight to determine the number of cups you need to drink each day