

How to Break a Weight Loss Plateau

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You've been doing a great job with your weight-loss program, but suddenly you feel like you've hit a wall. The pounds you were dropping earlier now stubbornly refuse to budge. Alas, it seems you've reached a dieter's plateau.

Weight-loss plateaus are very common. In fact, if you're trying to lose weight, it's pretty much guaranteed that you'll reach this frustrating stage at some point.

Discouraged? Don't be. Be assured there *are* steps you can take to bring your weight loss efforts to the next level and get back on track. And remember: It's best to lose weight slowly and sensibly so you can make changes that you'll keep for life.

Getting started ... again

For starters, don't go to extremes. Slashing too many calories can actually lower your metabolism. Maintaining that standard is also harder to do in the long run. Also, exercising *too* much is not only unrealistic, but may set you up for injury - especially if the exercise is new to you.

Instead, follow the sensible eating and exercise tips that follow.

Shake up your exercise routine

If you haven't been exercising, get started! Exercise is a crucial part of the formula in any weight-loss program. If you *are* currently active, here are several ways you can tweak your training routine to push you past the plateau. But always check with your doctor first before you change or increase your activity level.

- **Add variety.** If walking briskly or jogging is your sole form of exercise, try alternating with swimming, cycling or a fun aerobics class - anything that will change up your routine. Varying your activities will force you to use different muscles and can jumpstart your metabolism.
- **Intensify your workouts.** What was hard or challenging when you first started may not be so tough anymore. Try going a little faster on the treadmill, or use the incline feature so that you're walking uphill. Also, boost calorie burning by adding short bursts of higher-intensity movement, such as sprinting, to your usual routine. Most experts recommend 30- to 60-second bursts every three to four minutes.
- **Add some muscle.** Try doing more strength-building exercises, such as weight training or calisthenics. Strength training gives a metabolic boost by building more muscle, which burns more calories than fat.

Take stock of your diet

As you get comfortable with your diet, it's easy to stop paying attention and fall back into old habits.

- **Keep a food journal.** You may take a nibble here, a slightly larger snack there, an extra glass of wine. It's usually the little things that make all the difference. Try to keep an honest log of everything you eat and drink for one week. Starting a food diary will help you become more aware of what you're actually eating.
- **Watch refined carbs.** Healthy carbs (fruits, veggies, beans and whole grains) should comprise 45 percent to 55 percent of your meal plan. But pay special attention to the extra refined carbohydrates that tend to slip through the cracks. Be mindful not only of white flour and sugars, but also hidden carbs in foods such as ketchup, salad dressings, yogurts and soups.

- ***Make sure you are eating enough.*** Some dieters actually make the mistake of eating too little. This can cause a sluggish metabolism and thwart further weight loss efforts. Your body requires adequate fuel in order to feel comfortable shedding body fat, especially if you are active. Healthy, well balanced meals (and snacks) with plenty of lean protein, lots of veggies and small amounts of healthy fats will keep your metabolic fire burning.
- ***Vary your food choices.*** Just as you need to shake up your exercise routine, make sure your diet isn't stale. If you have oatmeal for breakfast every morning, try having eggs and whole-wheat toast. Salad with grilled chicken for lunch every day? How about a bean and veggie soup instead? Varying your nutrients can have an effect on how your body burns fuel as well as keep boredom at bay.

Finally, remember that weight loss is not just about numbers or the scale. Revisit your goals. It's not uncommon to lose sight of all the reasons you wanted to lose weight in the first place. And don't forget about the health benefits! Weight loss is about feeling better - not just looking better. And you may have already accomplished that goal.