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BREAK YOUR Weight-loss Plateau

"I have come to a standstill in my weight-loss programme!" This seems to be a common statement from clients when they have been working out for some time. If this has happened to you, it indicates that you have hit a weight-loss plateau. We look at why this happens and what you can do about it so that you continue to reap the benefits of your workouts and reach your goals.

When someone who has not worked out before starts to exercise, they notice changes happening to their shape and energy levels. Weight loss starts to happen after a few weeks of dedicated working out and eating well. They are expending more energy than they are consuming. This simple equation turns most people into weight-loss achievers. We notice changes more in the early stages of our weight-loss programme due to the increase in exercise and the fact that we have a keener eye for noticing our improvements.

A weight-loss plateau happens when there is a balance of energy in (kilojoules from food) and energy out (expended through physical activity) and your resting metabolism. This is actually a natural occurrence for most people when they are settling into an exercise routine.

Most people who are overweight or unhappy with their weight are at a weight-loss plateau. They feel like they have been stuck at a particular weight for a long time. If this is you, you need to increase activity levels through exercise and to consume fewer kilojoules from food. This alone is enough to break through the initial plateau and start to see changes through weight loss.

After some time with exercising regularly, eating well and losing weight, you may notice you have reached a plateau again. You may have a few kilos left to lose and are sticking to the routine that helped you initially, but are now finding it hard to budge those last few kilos. The weight may even start to creep back on even though you have not changed anything.

What is happening is that the energy equation of food intake versus activity output can balance out again. Sometimes, even though exercising regularly, your metabolic rate can drop. If you are still following your usual dietary routine, you may experience a plateau again. Your body does not want to change! It is just the way the human body works.

What can you do about this? The best way to break a plateau is to increase your activity levels or intensity. We do not recommend stopping eating!

You need to place new demands on the body to force it to change. Change is the biggest key to breaking your plateau. Hitting a plateau can play havoc with your motivation levels, so it is important to be ready for it and to have an action plan in place. Keep experimenting with your workouts and nutrition, or consult a professional Personal Trainer to devise the best plan of action for you.

4 WAYS TO BREAK THAT PLATEAU

1 Increase the amount of activity you do. Try to increase your activity levels at non-specific workout times as well as increasing the number of workouts during the week. One client increased her three cardio workouts to five times per week, and she also got herself a pedometer to assess how active she was each day in general. She became aware of how inactive she was over the course of the day. Aim for 8000-10,000 steps each day and strive to improve as you go. It will act as a great motivator and give you a tangible target each day.

2 Have a good look at your food intake. Are you consuming high kilojoules of foods without even knowing it? Read the labels of packets and cans to look for the amount of sugar and fat per serving. Then check what a serving really means. Some labels can list a serving as a fixed weight rather than an actual unit of product. For example, a chip packet can list a serving as 25g and have only 6 servings per packet. Yet you know there are close to 50 chips in the packet. Unless you are good at maths, it can be hard to figure out how many grams of energy (kilojoules), fat or sugar can be in each product unit.

3 Aim to decrease your sugar intake. Sugar can sneak into most foods including sauces, dressings and even breads. Sometimes we give up fat and unwittingly replace it with sugar. Foods such as muesli bars and fruit bars all state clearly they are low in fat, yet they can be high in sugar. Always read labels and, where you can, snack on fruit, sultanas or even gum to replace any sugary snacks.

4 Watch those portion sizes. A past client had a habit of consuming too much healthy food. There is such a thing as too much of a good thing! Even though foods can be considered healthy, it pays to look at your portion sizes and eat until you feel satisfied, not stuffed. Start a food diary to monitor your eating habits and tweak any areas where you are eating more than usual, comfort eating or consuming foods high in kilojoules. Once these are identified, it is easy to make changes and to start seeing results again.

As you experience a weight-loss plateau, keep in the back of your mind that plateaux happen to everyone. When you feel down or disheartened by your lack of results, know that with a bit of monitoring and adjusting you can start to fast track your efforts again. Weight loss is a journey. The timeline to arrive at goals varies from person to person. We are all unique. Realise that you will achieve your goals in time and that along the way you will have experienced other added benefits such as increased energy, fitness and overall health.

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