

Deal with a Plateau

Many dieters think that they should be able to lose weight every week without interruption. Do you think so too? Let me ask you this: Has that been your experience in the past? Most people lose some weight, stay the same for a week or two, lose some more, gain a little back, lose some more, plateau for a week or two, and so on. Some plateaus are short-lived. You might step on the scale one week and see no weight loss, but the next week you do. These mini plateaus are normal. They might be due to water retention, hormonal changes, or other biological influences. Or maybe you took in too many calories that week or exercised too little. Occasional plateaus and small weight gains are inevitable.

If you expect the scale to go down every week, you are setting yourself up for disappointment. As time goes on, you might find that you plateau for several weeks in a row. A number of studies have determined that nearly all dieters with a significant amount of weight to lose (more than 20 pounds) hit a plateau within the first six months of dieting.

Today, I'm not talking about short-lived plateaus. I am talking about more lengthy ones that span a few weeks or longer. The most likely explanation is that your body no longer needs as much energy (calories) as you have been taking in. If you hit one of these longer plateaus, you have four options:

1. Continue to do what you are doing and see if you start to lose weight again.
2. Reduce your daily calorie intake by 200 calories, which should allow you to lose about a half pound per week. (check with your health-care professional first to make sure it is reasonable to cut down some more.)
3. Increase your daily exercise by 15 to 20 minutes.
4. Call this your goal weight and move into maintenance.

You should expect occasional weight gains or plateaus, even if you have been doing everything right.

What are you thinking?

Sabotaging Thought: It is terrible that I have hit a plateau.

Helpful Response: Reaching a plateau is a normal part of losing weight. I'm feeling discouraged now because I put in a lot of effort. But this is supposed to happen from time to time. It doesn't necessarily mean I am doing anything wrong. I can ask my diet coach for help.

Sabotaging Thought: This just isn't fair. I have really worked hard. I should keep losing, just like I have up until this point.

Helpful Response: I have a choice now. I can dwell on how unfair it seems that the scale didn't go lower, or I can focus on how much weight I have lost up to this point and give myself credit for all of the changes I have made in my thinking and behaviour so far.

Objections to Exercising

Is there something that stops you from getting consistent exercise? Do you view yourself as a non-exerciser? Do you fail to solve problems because you don't really want to exercise? If so, then do the following:

- ✓ **Focus on how you will feel after you finish exercising**, not on how you feel at the moment. Remind yourself that the hardest part is just getting started.
- ✓ **Put exercise in the NO CHOICE category.** When you tell yourself, I don't have time, I don't feel like it, or I don't want to, respond the same way that you have learned to respond to your cravings. Tell yourself that you don't have a choice. Tell yourself, Oh well, and accept that you have to do it.
- ✓ **Meet a friend or trainer.** At first it might help to make an appointment with a friend or fitness professional or to sign up for a class. You will be more likely to keep this commitment if you are accountable to someone. A trainer, fitness instructor, or knowledgeable friend can show you how to exercise properly, so you will feel more confident that you are doing it correctly.
- ✓ **Give yourself lots of credit.** Every small step in the right direction deserves credit. Reward yourself for exercising - just not with unplanned food.
- ✓ **Focus on your progress.** Can you walk a minute longer than you used to? Can you exercise more vigorously than before? Remind yourself during every session that you are getting stronger and more physically fit.
- ✓ **End your session with something positive.** If you like a particular piece of equipment or exercise, plan to do it last. If you dislike a part of your exercise routine, do it in the middle. This way, you will leave feeling better about your exercise session and you will be more likely to follow through and do it next time.
- ✓ **TIP!** If it is hard to make yourself exercise first thing in the morning, lay out your exercise clothes the night before. Tape Response Cards to your bathroom mirror. Remind yourself that your reluctance will disappear once you get started, and you will be glad you got yourself to exercise.
- ✓ **Make sure you are doing a type of exercise you like.** If you get bored with what you are doing, change it. One client told me that she finally hit on blasting music and strenuously dancing, all by herself, in her living room. Another client really disliked the exercise class she had signed up for, she couldn't keep up. Finally, she switched to an easier class and began to enjoy it much more. A number of clients have taken up organised sports instead of such solo exercise as running or swimming. Try out different possibilities.

What are you thinking?

Sabotaging Thought: It's okay to skip exercising today because I don't want to, I'm Tired, and I'm too stressed.

Helpful Response: It's not okay. Exercise is an essential part of losing weight and maintaining my weight loss.

Don't put your life on hold

A lot of clients have the idea that they should put their lives on hold until they lose weight. Maureen is a good example. She discussed how she thought her life would be different once she lost weight. She said that once she got to her goal, she wanted to go away for a holidays, buy a new wardrobe, start dating again (she was divorced), and look for a new job.

“Why don't you start doing some of those activities now?” I asked her, she looked puzzled, “you mean while I'm still heavy?”

“yes now, why would you wait?” she replied “ I can't do those things now. It's because I want to be able to do these things that I am dieting in the first place.” After our discussion, Maureen was able to see how enriching her life now could actually facilitate her weight loss. As she developed new interests, engaged in pleasurable activities, and felt more effective, her mood would lift, she would focus on things other than food, and she would have more mental energy to diet. Like Maureen, have you put off enriching your life? Here is how to get started on making your life better today.

Do it now - Put aside at least 10 minutes today during which time you will not be interrupted or distracted. Then do the following:

- 1) Make a list of goals that you would like to accomplish before or after you lose weight. Do you want to change your job in some way? Become more computer savvy? Join a club? Meet new people? Improve relationships with family and friends? Pursue a hobby? Travel?
- 2) Look at your list. See which of your “after weight loss” goals you could actually start working toward right away.
- 3) Take one goal. Write down the steps you will need to do to accomplish it.
- 4) Get a calendar. Mark down when you will do at least the first step.
- 5) If you are uncertain of how to go about working toward a goal, ask friends or family for help. Mark on your calendar when you plan to consult with them. Doing so increases the likelihood that you will go ahead and devise a plan.
- 6) As you put activities on your calendar, watch for sabotaging thoughts. For example, if your goal is to look for a new job, you might think, what if it doesn't work out? What if I don't like it? If your goal is to be more sociable, you might have such thoughts as, what if no one wants to spend time with me?
- 7) Respond to your sabotaging thoughts in two ways: Look at the advantages and disadvantages of making this change in your life and use the Seven Question Technique to evaluate your concerns. Consult with your diet coach.
- 8) Continue the process with a second goal

Don't wait. Start engaging in some of these activities as soon as possible.

What are you thinking?

You undoubtedly should enrich your life – now. Don't let the following sabotaging thoughts stop you.

Sabotaging Thought: I don't deserve to reward myself until I have lost all the weight I need to lose.

Helpful Response: Of course I deserve to reward myself. Being overweight is not a moral failing. Everyone deserves to work toward having a better life.

Sabotaging Thought: I won't have as good a time if I do this activity before I have lost weight.

Helpful Response: That might be true, but before I go I can work on the unhelpful thoughts that could dampen my pleasure. I can do this activity once I lose weight, but I should also do it now. There is no reason to wait.