

# Breaking through a Plateau

By Jeff Nuese

Losing a few pounds at first and then finding out your progress has come to a dead stop is a common occurrence for many people trying to lose weight. This plateau is due to the body trying to maintain a consistent number of calories burned to prevent the body from starving itself. When you first start an exercise or diet plan, you usually consume fewer calories but also burn more through exercise which is the reason for weight loss. However, your body gradually adjusts by burning fewer calories in order to prevent using up all the energy resources such as stored body fat resulting in a slow down of weight loss. A good way to boost your metabolism and break through the plateau is to make sure you are doing 30 minutes of cardio (walking, etc.) 3-4 times a week while incorporating weight training. This allows you to burn more calories faster by decreasing your fat and increasing your muscle. You can also add variety to your cardiovascular exercise by adding interval training or short bursts of higher intensity exercise followed by less intense exercise. For example, sprinting for 30 to 60 seconds followed by one or two minutes of a less intense exercise.

One of the first things is to stop focusing on the bathroom scale so often. A change in the scale typically reflects the pounds of bodily fluid you gain and lose in a day rather than how much fat you've gained or lost. A better way of measurement is a tape measure or the same pair of jeans every 4 weeks which will help keep you from getting frustrated if you don't see dramatic improvements every individual week. Muscle is denser than fat which may be why the scale isn't decreasing, yet you could be losing inches. Just because you're not losing weight doesn't mean you're not losing body fat as well. Also keep in mind that you must burn 3,500 calories to lose a pound of body fat which may equal only about one to two pounds a week. Stay positive; try to view hitting a plateau as a good thing because it means that your body has less fat to lose.

Diet is another factor that can help you break through a plateau. Try keeping a food journal of everything you eat and drink to find extra calories you can cut out in the future. Instead of drinking a can of pop, get bottled water instead which can help cut calories and sugar. Keep an eye on carbohydrates as well. Too much sugar can cause food cravings and an increase in blood sugar slowing up weight loss. You can also try to increase the amount of protein you take in while decreasing the amount of carbohydrates in your diet. This will help maintain and improve lean muscle resulting in an increase in the number of calories burned.

Be clear on your ultimate weight loss goal by setting one that is reasonable and realistic. Each individual has their own ideal weight and sizes so don't compare you to anyone else. Make sure you drink plenty of water with your weight loss program. Staying hydrated not only helps burn fat efficiently but also helps control hunger throughout the day. Another way to get past a plateau is to change the method of performing an exercise. If you're used to using a machine, switch to using free weights. You can still do the same exercise but just change the method which will keep your muscles guessing and keep you from getting bored with resistance training. Stick with exercises you enjoy while adding some variety by changing your routine a little each week, either through intensity or the type of exercise.

Remember to be flexible and focus on small positive changes. If your joints are aching, it might be a good idea to give them a break and go easy. This can happen when you increase the intensity of your workout. You should also focus on using good form and listen to your body. Don't jerk or bounce the weights if they get too heavy. Maintain the right attitude and you should be able to get through any obstacle. Mental and emotional factors can influence your food intake and exercise habits which can lead to an increase or decrease in weight. Identifying and acknowledging your fitness downfalls enables you to see what you need to change in order to break through the barrier. Make sure you write down specific goals that are challenging but realistic and commit yourself to achieving them no matter what it takes. Award yourself for reaching those goals as well. All of these resources will help you get through the plateau phase which everyone is sure to come across at some point of time in his or her workouts.