

8 WAYS TO BEAT A PLATEAU

8 ways to break a plateau
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You're losing weight at a nice clip when all of a sudden the scale stops moving, and it seems like there's nothing in the world you can do about it. Weeks go by and the needle hasn't budged. You've hit the moment every dieter dreads: a plateau.

When you're on a weight loss journey, the question isn't whether or not you'll hit a plateau, it's when. Plateaus are like bad weather on a long hike: it's inevitable that you'll run into it, but knowing that in advance doesn't make it one bit less frustrating or annoying when it happens. However, cheer up. Because plateaus are as common as rain, we have a pretty good idea what to do about them. There's an excellent chance that at least one of the following techniques will help you break through.

1. Be a calorie detective: When someone tells me she's stopped losing weight, the first thing I ask is this: how many calories a day are you eating? While calories are not the whole story - far from it - they are still an important component of weight loss, and they have a way of creeping up while we are not paying attention. Be brutally honest with yourself - what are you eating and how much? Using a food diary for a while is a great way to monitor this. And yes, sodas and alcoholic beverages count! Good rule of thumb: for weight loss, aim for calories close to your target weight times 10.

2. Change it up: The classic advice when you're not making gains in an exercise program is to change your routine. Same holds true here. Low carbers might try a higher carb diet for a few days, high carbers might switch to Atkins or South Beach. At the very least, vary your ratio of protein to fat to carbs. Even varying calorie intake may have a positive effect: if you're average intake is 1500 calories try dropping to 1200 for a day, going up to 2000 and then dropping back to 1500. You get the idea - your body has gotten comfortable. It takes time to shake things up.

3. Exercise a temporary ban: Food sensitivities can cause us to hold on to weight and bloat, and the frustrating thing is that most of us don't always know which foods cause us to do this. So play the odds: highest on the list of "usual suspects" are grains (Wheat in particular), dairy and sugar. Put a temporary ban on all three and see what happens.

4. Kick it up a notch. Or three. There's been a lot of rumble in the exercise community over the best way to work out for fat loss and the consensus is moving towards high Intensity intervals. Forget the "fat burning zone" and go for broke.

High Intensity intervals - 30 to 60 seconds - are the wave of the future. If you're used to going at level three, ramp it up to level 6 for a minute then slow back down, catch your breath and do it again. Ever see a sprinter with love handles? Training like a sprinter will lower your body fat faster than any technique I know of, plus it will boost your metabolism and lower your weight. Bye bye plateau.

5. Revisit strength training. If you're not strength training, start now. And if you are, ramp it up a notch. Muscle is your greatest ally in breaking a plateau. Unfortunately many women train with weights too light to produce the metabolic boost we're looking for. Don't be afraid of heavier weights - you should reach the point where you can't do another rep sometime between reps 8-12.

6. Up your protein: Study after study shows that a higher ratio of protein to carbs makes losing body fat easier. Protein boosts the metabolism (in one study as much as 100 percent for 24 hours), and it also increases satiety, making it more likely that you won't overeat. A higher protein diet could be just what you need to break that plateau.

7. Try a gentle detox. While fasting for weight loss unsupervised is a really bad idea, the idea of giving your system a rest makes sense. One way to do it is with a "smart fast" of nothing but fruits and vegetables for a couple of days. The added fiber is always helpful, and the massive amount of nutrients and phytochemicals is like "spring cleaning" for your metabolism.

8. Do a personal Inventory. Believe it or not, other things besides diet and exercise could be stalling your weight loss. Stress, for example. Or lack of sleep. Or medications. Take a look and see what else is going on in your life that might need attention. Sometimes when you clean up the problems in one area of your life, problems in other areas just naturally take care of themselves.