

PhysicallyFIT



When the Weight WON'T COME OFF...

By Laura Picciano, DO

Weight loss is tough no matter who you are or what your fitness level is. Whether you are just getting started or hitting a plateau, one thing is certain, if you are not losing weight, your energy intake is close to what your energy expenditure is. In order to lose, you will need to tilt that balance so that expenditure is greater than energy in. This occurs either by raising metabolism (as in increasing activity), or by calorie reduction. But how about other hidden factors that may be a culprit in your weight loss journey? Here's what to look for, and may want to discuss with your doctor.

CALORIES IN

Be sure you are not having more calories than you think. The amount of calories you need depends on your age and activity level. Men require more calories than women. In order to reduce weight by one pound a week, 500 calories need to be dropped or exercised away from that base value. Many people do not know how many calories they need as that base number. If you visit the American Cancer Society website www.cancer.org you can find a nice questionnaire that can give you a good idea of your caloric needs.

Be very careful when you figure out how much you are consuming. I tell my patients to weigh and measure everything according to the recommended portion sizes. You can't rely on "a spoonful" or "a plateful" because even our utensils are super-sized nowadays. Most people are shocked to realize that they are usually consuming a lot more than they thought. A majority of restaurants and eateries provide on average twice the portion size than recommended. Remember about those hidden calories, especially when you are not preparing the food yourself. This includes those items that prepare the food (like oil) as well as sauces and dressings. Here's a good one: go check out a nice healthy salad premixed at a convenience store. Maybe about 200- 300 calories for the salad, but the packet of salad dressing may be 300 calories alone!



As much as we wish they wouldn't, beverages count too. Sweetened beverages can have as many calories as a meal, and they won't fill you up. There are even studies looking at the connection between sodas and weight gain, independent of caloric value. But soda is only ONE culprit.

Be careful of the lattes, fruit juices, and energy drinks. You may be surprised to see how high in calories they are. For those of you who have a good old regular coffee or tea, watch the cream and sugar you add. That counts too, especially if that cup is very large! And lest we forget that cocktail or beer at dinner. You could be adding several hundred calories to your meal on a long night out.

THE BURN

We all know that muscle weighs more than fat, but it is muscle that helps to burn fat and support metabolism. Unfortunately, muscle is lost in the process of weight loss. This is why so many people are doomed to regain lost weight if they do not continue to exercise. It is therefore very important to do resistance training in a weight loss program to retard the loss of muscle and maintain what you have. Muscle is lost with age, thus contributing to a slower metabolism, as we grow older. Just as we underestimate calories, many overestimate calories burned.

The cardio equipment we use at the gym is not always accurate and should not be used as an absolute amount. The good news is that activity adds up, so if a trip to the gym or a long jog is not on the schedule, you can add bits of activity in your day to up the energy consumption. Take the stairs, forget the car if you can. Go ahead and think creatively to add that extra energy to your daily chores. You'll be glad you did.

DO I HAVE A PROBLEM?

Most problems with weight loss concern lifestyle issues. We certainly see plenty of metabolic problems in primary practice. One topic that has received plenty of press is the presence of high insulin levels, typically seen in type II diabetes. Insulin is a hormone that allows us to regulate our blood sugar. Elevated insulin levels are not good for the body. High insulin levels promote fat storage and cause inflammation of blood vessel walls that cause coronary disease. Diets high in sugar and refined carbohydrates cause elevated insulin levels.

Certain medical conditions, such as polycystic ovarian syndrome in women, also result in elevated insulin levels that make weight loss very difficult. These women often have a history of irregular periods, acne, and facial hair. Men with low testosterone may also have a hard time with weight loss, as testosterone is important in the development of muscle and metabolic support. Hormone loss occurs with age, and its replacement for men and women remains a controversial topic in medicine.

More commonly, we see problems with thyroid function, which have a direct impact on metabolism. Symptoms of hypothyroidism are numerous and include fatigue, low body temperature and heart rate, irregular and heavy periods in women, dry skin, as well as leg swelling.

Your medication may also be to blame. Weight gain is frequently seen in many drugs used for diabetes (including insulin), certain blood pressure medications, psychiatric drugs, and even in oral contraceptives.

Medications that are steroid derivatives, used in inflammatory diseases, are the worst culprit of weight gain. If any of these are of concern to you, I suggest you talk to your doctor.

Remember that weight loss is a long process when done right. When in doubt, start a journal! Write down EVERYTHING that goes in your mouth, even chewing gum, and log your activity. Be realistic and aim for no more than two pounds a week. Best of luck with your endeavors, and remember that you can do this with a little perseverance.



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