



## Topics

1. Causes of a weight loss plateau
2. Ways to overcome plateaus
3. The emotion of weight loss plateaus
4. Your strategies for overcoming a weight loss plateau

“It’s not that I’m so smart, it’s just that I stay with problems longer”

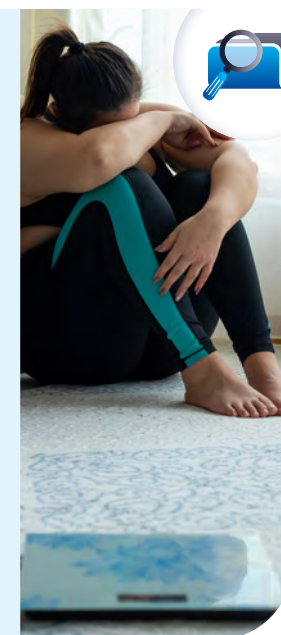
~ Albert Einstein

For those wishing to reduce their weight, this module outlines some simple ways to overcome weight loss plateaus in order to maintain your journey towards a healthier weight.

Plateaus are a normal part of the weight loss process - they will happen to everyone at some stage. Some weeks you will lose more weight than expected, and others you may hit a frustrating plateau, even though you may be using the same healthy weight strategies. Whilst plateaus can be disheartening, it is important for you to maintain motivation and use these times as an opportunity to assess your weight loss strategies and goals, as well as to celebrate your progress to date.

## Key Points

- Plateaus are a normal part of the weight loss process and provide an opportunity to reassess your weight loss strategies.
- Your plateau may be due to your metabolism slowing as you lose weight. Decreasing energy in (food and drink) whilst increasing energy out (physical activity) will help overcome your weight loss plateau.
- Plateaus may be disheartening; however, it is important to maintain motivation and celebrate your weight loss achievements to date.





## 1. Causes of a weight loss plateau

Even though you may be continuing to increase your physical activity, eat healthy meals and reduce portions sizes, the rate of your weight loss will at times slow down, and in some instances may stall altogether. Reaching weight loss plateaus is a normal part of your weight loss process and provides an opportunity to review your weight loss strategies and goals.

There may be several reasons why you experience a weight loss plateau:

### Increased muscle mass and fitness

You may have increased your muscle mass due to your increased physical activity, and at the same time you may be losing fat. Your weight may remain the same on the scales, but progress may be better reflected in the change in your body composition. Take your waist measurement to assess how your body may be changing shape.

A benefit of increased muscle mass is that it helps increase your metabolism. On the other hand, as you gain fitness and muscle mass, your physical activity will become easier for you, and therefore less energy will be burned during exercise. You will need to review the type of exercises you do, as well as how long and how hard you perform them. It may be time to change your physical activity schedule.

### Lapse in weight management strategy

Perhaps you have stopped losing weight due to a series of lapses (which may have been intentional or accidental). Maybe your portion sizes have been increasing lately, or you have been out for a few meals where you were unsure of the ingredients in certain dishes, or you have had a few more wines or beers than usual? Perhaps you have missed a couple of exercise sessions or cut short some of your workouts? By keeping a food and activity diary for a few days (see “Making Good Habits for Life”), you will be able to assess whether you are getting off track and need realignment!

### Slower metabolism

The closer you get to a healthy weight, your metabolism slows down as fewer kilojoules / calories are needed to support a smaller body (you no longer need as much energy to fulfil your basal metabolic activities such as breathing, pumping your heart and other vital bodily functions).

You also burn less energy than you did at your heavier weight doing the same physical activities. Your body has found a new equilibrium, so in order to lose more weight you need to further decrease energy in and further increase energy out. Using the same approach that worked initially may maintain your weight loss, but it will not lead to further weight loss. The closer you get to your ideal weight, the harder it will be to lose those extra kilograms.

### Set point theory

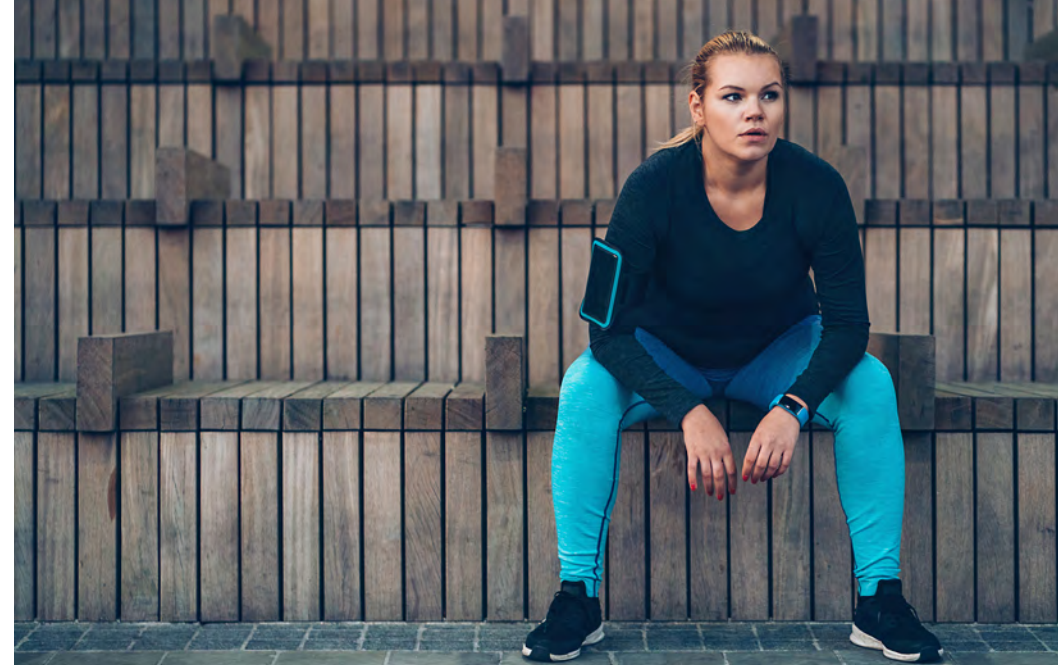
Once at a particular weight, the body will strive to return to this previous weight and may even ramp up your appetite to try and achieve this. But you can be reassured, with good consistent habits and hunger management through dietary balance and planning, your body will eventually accept this lower weight.



## 2. Ways to overcome plateaus

There are ways to overcome weight loss plateaus, so make sure to acknowledge your successes to date, maintain motivation and forge on with a revised healthy weight strategy!

- Review your eating, drinking and activity patterns. Keep a food and activity diary for a few days to assess whether your plateau is a result of a lapse. Once you identify a problem area, you already have the knowledge to get back on track. Make sure you are controlling your portion sizes. It may just be that you are eating more than you intended.
- Ensure that you are eating and drinking at least a total of 5000kJ (1200 cal) per day, otherwise your weight loss will not be sustainable, and your body will not be getting the nutrients it needs. This can be further discussed with your Healthy Weight for Life care team.
- Sometimes in order to overcome a plateau all that is needed is change, as your body may have adapted to your healthy weight strategies. Whether it be a change to your sleeping cycle (going to bed earlier or sleeping in longer), a change to your diet (focus on high fibre foods rather than continuing to reduce), or a change to your exercise routine (take a different route, add weights, or increase speed). You may even find it enjoyable mixing things up a bit!
- Increase your physical activity. To do this, you can either spend more time exercising (for example, add 10 minutes to your activity), or if possible, you can increase the intensity of your workout (for example walk faster, carry hand weights, or include some short jogs in your walk). Remember that physical activity has many added health benefits including the health of your heart, bones, and mental health, to name a few.
- Include muscle building exercises to your physical activity, as increased muscle mass will help you burn more energy. Try an exercise bike, swimming, pilates, yoga or resistance exercises via a TheraBand or light weights at home or trying out a nearby gym.
- Try to increase your level of general activity every day, for example walk places instead of driving the car, spring clean your house or do some work in the garden.
- Revisit your weight loss goals to ensure that the amount and rate of weight loss you are expecting to achieve is realistic for you.
- Remember to think long term. Be patient. The road to your healthy weight is a long one that will be achieved one step at a time.



## 3. The emotion of weight loss plateaus

It is important to stay focused and motivated when you reach a weight-loss plateau, even though you may feel disheartened.

### Focus on your initial motivators.

- What are the reasons you decided to take this journey in the first place?
- Has your health already improved?
- Do you have more energy?
- Are you already able to interact with your family and friends in a more positive way?

### Reflect on your achievements to date

- Revisit your goals.
- Where did your health journey begin?
- How far have you come in relation to achieving your long-term health goals?

## Deal with a lapse before it becomes a relapse

It is much easier to overcome a plateau, or lose a small amount of weight that may have been regained, rather than to have to try to lose all the weight you have already lost all over again.

## Keep your thoughts positive

Self-defeating thoughts often lead to negative feelings and negative actions. You are not a failure if you lapse or plateau - you are normal! By keeping your thoughts positive, you are more likely to succeed. Be kind and encouraging to yourself – you've got this! Just try to 'control the controllables' and trust in the good habits you have developed.

## Don't weigh yourself too often

Your weight will fluctuate daily for a range of reasons. Weighing yourself too often will result in a rollercoaster of emotion and self-confidence, as fluctuations are inevitable. Think long term and weigh yourself at the same time of day on only one day of the week and on the same set of scales.



In summary, weight loss is a dynamic process, and you will not lose the same amount of weight each week. Whilst weight loss plateaus can be disheartening, they are a normal part of the weight loss process. Remember to celebrate the successes you have achieved. By improving your eating patterns and increasing your physical activity, you have already made significant improvements to your health. You now have the tools and knowledge for successful weight loss.

As time goes on, it is easy to revert back to old habits, so try to be vigilant of these, maintain an awareness of your decisions and understand that plateau's are normal.

## 4. Your strategies for overcoming a weight loss plateau

What improvements have you noticed since starting the Healthy Weight For Life program?

(e.g. I have more energy and I am able to keep up with my kids)

If you have hit a plateau, what have you identified as being the cause?

(e.g. I have been on holidays and I overate)

What strategies can you implement in order to overcome a plateau?

(e.g. I will start a weekly yoga class)