



10 Things That Could Be Holding Back Your Weight-Loss

For most people weight-loss is not as straightforward as just restricting calorie intake. There are many different factors that can play a role in weight-gain.

Here are 10 things you might not be considering that could be holding you back on your weight-loss journey.

1. You're restricting calories too much

When calories are chronically restricted, our body might go into starvation mode. This means that because the body thinks it's going through a period of food scarcity it will try to hold on to as much stored body fat as possible to ensure longer survival. The metabolism can slow down.

For the female body this can be especially difficult as it can negatively affect hormone balance (a starved body can't reproduce safely), which in turn can affect weight.

Calories in/calories out is too simplistic – it is the type of calories we need to be concerned about. Although we do need a certain amount of calorie deficit to start burning body fat we also need to be careful about not consuming too few calories.

So if you have been restricting calories and your weight-loss has stalled – try to make sure you're nourished!

Get your calories from real foods like vegetables and fruits, meat, seafood, eggs and good fats like avocado, coconut oil, butter, olive oil and nuts and seeds.

2. You're stressed a lot

You might think that stress would cause weight loss (and in some people it can), but this is probably due to undereating.

In many people stress can contribute to weight gain. *Why?* It is excess blood sugar that gets stored as fat (not dietary fat!). But before it gets stored as fat, it is stored in the liver and muscles for situations in which we need extra energy.

Stress produces a 'flight or fight' response in the body and stored sugar is released so we can have extra energy.

But rarely do we ever actually need to fight or flee – so now all that extra sugar gets stored as fat!

This is why long periods of stress can make us gain weight (or at least make it difficult to lose it).

Meditation, yoga and deep breathing exercises can help with stress management. Being outside in nature has also been shown to reduce stress.

3. You're missing essential fats

Have you reduced fat intake in order to lose weight? Or are your main sources of fats vegetable oils and margarine? You could be missing some essential fats.

The essential fats are Omega 3 and Omega 6 fats found in oily fish and nuts and seeds. They are essential because the body can't make them – so we need to get them through the diet.

And why are they important for weight loss? Our cell membranes are partially made out of these fats. This helps the membrane to be flexible in order to allow nutrients to move into the cell and waste products out of the cell. If we are missing these fats, the cell membranes could become too rigid. Body fat is stored in fat cells and if these cells are too rigid, stored fat can become trapped inside the cell – making weight loss difficult!

Try to consume oily fish like salmon, sardines or mackerel at least twice a week and consume a moderate amount of nuts and seeds. Cut down (or better: avoid) vegetable oils and margarine.

4. You eat too many simple carbs

Contrary to popular believe it is not fat that makes us fat, it is sugar. But sugar is not only found in pure table sugar, it is found in all carbohydrates (carbs are anything that is not protein or fat).

When we consume carbohydrates, they are all eventually converted into glucose, which is the sugar our body uses for energy production. Any excess of sugar in our body first gets stored in the liver and muscles to be used in cases of need. The rest is stored as body fat.

Now there are two types of carbohydrates: simple and complex. Complex carbohydrates are foods like coloured vegetables, whole grains and pulses. They contain a good amount of fibre and are digested slowly so their glucose is released slowly.

Simple carbohydrates on the other hand are foods like sugar, white flour products, white potatoes and crisps. These are digested quickly and can cause a sudden spike of glucose in the blood. Since this is usually more than our body immediately needs for energy production (especially if we're sedentary as well) the excess gets stored as fat.

So if you're consuming simple carbs, try to reduce and replace them with complex carbs instead.

5. You've gone too low carb

Going low carb is a big trend in health and fitness circles. And it is true that an excess of (mainly simple) carbohydrates are often implicated in weight gain

But we still need glucose from carbohydrates to create energy.

Our thyroid needs glucose to convert its hormones into their active forms.

Therefore, too few carbs could negatively impact the thyroid – potentially leading to a slower metabolism.

For women, a lack of carbs could also negatively affect hormone balance. An efficient metabolism and hormone balance are both important for losing weight.

If you've gone low carb and have initially lost weight but then weight-loss has stalled you may need to add carbs back in. Try to have at least 100 gram of carbs a day, especially if you're a woman (from fruits or starchy root vegetables).

6. You're doing a lot of cardio training

While some exercise is important for weight-loss, excessive exercise stresses the body. And we know that stress can promote weight gain.

Excessive cardio training can be especially stressful. Unless intensity of the cardio workouts is increased, your body can adapt pretty quickly. Therefore progress could be minimal.

So more is not necessarily better. Keep it short, intense and purposeful. Most of all: find a form of exercise that you can enjoy!

7. You're not balancing your meals

I've mentioned the different types of carbs and how they act in the body in Tip number 4.

If we eat mainly carbs by themselves, they are absorbed fairly quickly – even complex carbs. Protein and fat can slow down the digestion of carbs so that glucose is released slowly and gradually into the blood.

This means less fat storage, more stable energy and less food cravings!

I'd recommend to try and have about a quarter of your plate as protein and fats, maybe an eighth of starchy carbs (which are root vegetables, rice, grains and pulses) and the rest as non-starchy vegetables (all the green and colourful vegetables).

8. Your hormones are out of whack

Our hormones are like an orchestra in our body – if they are in tune with each other, everything will run smoothly. If one is off, chaos can result.

One of the effects of imbalanced hormones can be weight gain.

For example, an excess of oestrogen or too little progesterone can cause weight gain. Low thyroid hormone can slow down metabolism and cause weight gain. Too little testosterone can decrease muscle mass and increase fat mass.

Hormonal birth control can lead to imbalanced hormones.

It is impossible to know what is wrong without testing, so test, test, test before jumping to conclusions (and if you're on hormonal birth control consider other methods)!

9. Your gut bacteria is out of whack

Our gut bacteria can fulfil many important functions and help us to be healthy.

But the wrong kind of microbes in the gut can also have the opposite effect: A dominance of certain bacteria has been associated with weight gain as they can extract more calories from our food.

Pathogens can also make us crave foods and contribute to inflammation, which can also lead to weight problems.

If you feel like your digestion is off and you suffer from symptoms like bloating, consider supporting your beneficial gut flora by consuming prebiotics and probiotics.

10. You've got food intolerances

Hidden food intolerances can cause chronic low-grade inflammation, a lack of energy and a host of other problems.

Chronic inflammation can make weight-loss more difficult as it affects a part of the brain that is responsible for hunger signals and fat storage.

If you suspect you are intolerant to a certain food, remove it from your diet for at least 1 month. Then slowly retest it.

You can also do a food intolerance test or get the 'food detective' app.

I hope that one of these tips can help you on your weight-loss journey. Thank you for reading!

Layla x