Strive to Succeed – May 23, 2012
Plateau Checklist

✓ I’ve seen the doctor or nurse practitioner this year
  o I reached out to the dietitian
  o I’ve had yearly lab draws
✓ I have a bariatric buddy
✓ I keep food diaries to review patterns and hiccups
  o I share those diaries with the dietitian
  o I make a plan and execute changes when I notice patterns
✓ I’ve changed my exercise habits
  o Increased cardio
  o Added weight training
  o Changed exercise type
  o Used a buddy
  o Hired a trainer
  o Tracked exercise
  o I’ve been more consistent with my exercise
✓ I’ve “cleaned house” and removed snacks from home and work
  o I make a weekly grocery list to have good foods on hand
  o I plan meals ahead of time
  o I bring my lunch to work
  o I’ve reduced the amount of times I eat out every week
✓ I’m eating protein at every meal
✓ I’ve increased my vegetable intake
✓ I limit my starches to 2 per day
✓ I eat every 3-4 hours
✓ I eat breakfast
  o Within one hour of waking up
  o Every day
✓ I’ve reduced the stress in my life
  o I have a list of activities I can do instead of eating

"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result."
~Albert Einstein
10 Ways to Move Beyond a Weight Loss Plateau

Experts share tips on how to get your weight loss program back on track.

By Debra Fulghum Bruce, PhD
WebMD Feature
Reviewed by Michael W. Smith, MD

Hit a weight loss plateau? It's hard to fathom that for weeks your weight loss program was taking the pounds off. Then, suddenly, the scales won't budge another ounce.

Take heart. A weight loss plateau is normal. No matter how diligent you are in following your good health regimen, from time to time you'll fall off the wagon. The key to getting back on the program, experts say, is to acquire the skills and self-knowledge that will enable you to recover after a relapse.

Start Losing Again

We've pulled together the top 10 plateau-busting strategies for you to try right now.

1. Imagine You: Healthy and Vibrant

Have a vision of success. According to Katherine Tallmadge, MA, RD, author of Diet Simple, the mind is a strong tool -- use it to achieve what you want.

"Visualize yourself dancing at an upcoming celebration in a fabulous black dress," Tallmadge tells WebMD, "and then apply that vision every day to stay motivated."

While you're imagining, remind yourself of reality: excess weight is unhealthy, as is yo-yo dieting. Make sure this is a lifetime commitment for optimal health instead of a temporary plan to drop 10 pounds before bathing suit season -- which you may regain again once you stop your program.

To stay compliant to your weight loss program, Tallmadge suggests keeping only healthy foods in the refrigerator, so you're less likely to stop and grab something greasy on the way home from work. "Even if your family isn't dieting, you can still keep tempting foods out of the kitchen

2. Understand Your Weight Loss Personality

According to Thomas R. Przybeck, PhD, personality plays a role in our attitude towards food. As an assistant professor of psychiatry at Washington University School of Medicine, St. Louis, Przybeck recommends that you know your tendencies and tailor your plan to conquer the unproductive inclinations.

Impulsive. "If you have a tendency to be impulsive, you might see a pint of Ben & Jerry's in the freezer and go for it," Przybeck says. Clearly, you are a dieter who needs to remove those temptations.

Oblivious. If you tend to not pay attention when you eat -- maybe you're a TV snacker? - - you need to avoid such situations if you want to control portions.
Uptight. "If you are highly anxious, you will probably have more difficulty," Przybeck says. "Those who are anxious, nervous, and depressed might eat to feel better."

Tenacious. Certain personalities don't find it that difficult losing weight. "If you are highly self-directed, cooperative, and have a lot of stick-to-it-ive-ness, you are going to have an easier time," Przybeck says.

Sociable. Przybeck also found that if you tend to monitor your food intake better than others, you may be more sociable.

3. Record Every Food Morsel You Eat, Taste, or Lick

Underestimating just how much food you've eaten is a common mistake, one that can lead to a weight loss plateau or weight gain. Yet keeping a diary of your daily food intake (every bite, taste, or lick) can help you see where you're going wrong. Try these food diary tips:

- Track the time of day and your feelings when you eat to discover problem times and emotions that cause you to binge eat.
- Recognize your eating triggers and find healthier foods to satisfy your hunger or better alternatives than food to cope with your emotions.
- Monitor your progress, track your new behaviors, and reward yourself with a manicure or movie for all your hard work.

4. Beware of 'Calorie Creep'

A key reason for a weight loss plateau is eating more than you think. It's easy for portion sizes to creep up, and before you know it, you end up eating more than your plan prescribes. That's why it's important to weigh and measure your food to understand proper portions. Try cutting your daily calorie intake by 100 or 200 to move beyond the weight loss plateau. Here's how:

- Eat a high-fiber breakfast that will help reduce the quantity of food eaten at lunch.
- Use mustard or low-fat mayonnaise on your sandwich instead of regular mayonnaise.
- Have a piece of fresh fruit instead of cookies or chips.
- Drink diet soda instead of regular soda.
- Choose sherbet or sorbet over super-premium ice cream.
- Use 2 tablespoons of light whipped butter or margarine instead of regular.
- Top your favorite pasta with a red sauce instead of a cream sauce.
- Eat a snack-sized chocolate bar instead of a whole candy bar. And choose heart-healthy dark chocolate.
- Order your pizza with veggies instead of high-fat meat toppings.
- Order your sandwich on whole-grain bread instead of a croissant or bagel.
- Try an open-faced sandwich with only one slice of bread.
5. Watch Restaurant Overeating

At restaurants, rich foods and supersized portions can sway even the most determined dieter. Especially if you eat out often, look at restaurant eating as a chance to practice good portion control.

According to Tallmadge, there isn't a law that says you must order an entree every time you eat out. "Pay attention to your appetite, and order a dinner salad or appetizer instead of a main dish," Tallmadge says, "or take half home in a doggie bag."

6. Eat Low-Fat Protein to Manage Hunger Pangs

New findings show that a high protein diet can help squelch hunger. Protein foods work by suppressing ghrelin, a hormone secreted by the stomach that stimulates appetite (yes, it triggers hunger!). In a new study published in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism, researchers found that foods high in fat actually raised levels of ghrelin and increased hunger. Carbohydrates soon made people even hungrier than they were before they had eaten. But it was the protein foods that lowered levels of ghrelin substantially, helping to keep hunger pangs in check.

Researchers concluded that the findings suggest possible mechanisms contributing to the effects of high-protein/low-carb diets to promote weight loss, and high-fat diets to promote weight gain.

7. Eat More Fruits and Vegetables

Fill up on produce. Eating lots of low-calorie, high-volume fruits and vegetables crowds out other foods that are higher in fat and calories. Move the meat off the center of your plate and pile on the vegetables. Or try starting lunch or dinner with a vegetable salad or bowl of broth-based soup, suggests Barbara Rolls, PhD, author of The Volumetrics Eating Plan.

The U.S. government's dietary guidelines suggest that we get 7-13 cups of produce daily. Make sure you stock your kitchen with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables and add a few servings at each meal. In doing so, you'll boost your intake of healthful vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, phytochemicals, and fiber. In addition, if you fill up on low-calorie, nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables, you'll be less likely to binge on highly processed snacks.

8. Push the Envelope Past That Plateau

Hitting the treadmill every day for a 30-minute walk or doing the neighborhood loop with your buddies gets your body into a groove. After a while, your muscles get used to the routine and become very efficient at doing the task at hand.

To keep your muscles guessing -- and performing the ultimate calorie burn -- vary your physical activity. And push the envelope to power past that plateau!
For example, during your 30-minute treadmill session, include a few intervals at higher speed or at a higher incline (climb hills if you're walking outside). Sustain this higher intensity for a few minutes, and then return to your comfort level. After you recover, do it again -- and again. This will help you burn more calories and blast through the plateau.

Also make sure your routine includes strength-training exercises (like weight lifting), which help counteract muscle loss due to aging. Building and preserving muscle mass is a key factor in reaching a healthy weight, as muscle requires more calories to maintain than fat.

9. Wear a Pedometer

Wearing a pedometer each day and having a daily step goal can boost your activity level and burn more calories. Wearing a pedometer may also help decrease blood pressure.

Put the pedometer on first thing in the morning. Then make it a point to be more active: pace while you talk on the phone, take the dog out for an extra walk, and march in place during television commercials. Each 2,000 steps burn roughly 100 more calories, so aim for 10,000 steps daily for weight loss.

If you thrive on feedback and praise, buy a talking pedometer that rewards you by reporting aloud (and loudly!) the number of steps you've walked.

10. Try Yoga to Avoid Stress Eating

Stress eating is bingeing on food -- homemade chocolate chip cookies, salty chips, a handful of this, a fistful of that -- to soothe your inner emotional turmoil, not your real hunger. Studies show that yoga lowers levels of stress hormones and increases insulin sensitivity -- a signal to your body to burn food as fuel rather than store it as fat.

Britt Berg, MS, research manager and therapist at Emory University Medical School, recommends the "child's pose" to clients who want to avoid stress eating.

Start by kneeling on the floor on your hands and knees, making sure that your hands are under the shoulders and your knees under the hips, with toes touching. Stretch your neck forward and lengthen your spine through the tailbone. Gently rock the weight of your body back toward your feet, allowing your hips to stretch farther back as you continue to lengthen and stretch your spine.

Now, stretch your arms forward and walk your fingertips as far forward as they will go on the floor or rug, lengthening your arms fully. Extend your hips back until they come toward your heels. If you're very flexible, you may be able to rest your hips on your heels and your forehead on the floor.

Berg recommends putting your forehead on the rug or pillow to calm your mind. Do the "child's pose" any time you feel the urge to binge on high-calorie snacks.