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How to Navigate Plateaus

So, you've hit a physical or mental plateau and you are feeling frustrated? Physical and mental plateaus are a normal part of life. Recognizing the factors that lead to these plateaus and addressing them will keep you from throwing in the towel the next time this occurs.

You've been consistent with your workouts but the scale won't budge? It may be time to address your eating patterns. The first course of action is to food journal you daily intake. What we perceive we eat and what we actually eat, are almost always two different things. Record the time of day, how much and what you are eating and then review these patterns. Do you see a lot of processed foods? Start to replace these with their whole food counterparts. Do you see gaps of 4+ hours in between eating? Preplan some healthy snacks to take with you and focus on eating something healthy every 3-4 hours. Do you see a lot of eating out? Simply cutting back on restaurant trips will save you time and calories. Consider working with a nutritionist, who can help identify what behaviors are working for your goals and which are working against your goals. There are often some very easy strategies that come out of these sessions that you will effortlessly be able to implement and will finally help you start moving towards your health goals again.

Are you restricting too many calories? Cutting back too much on caloric intake can result in the body going into starvation mode, which is counterproductive in weight loss. Physical plateaus can result from your metabolism slowing down in response to dieting. As you reduce your calories over time your basal metabolic rate decreases and shedding unwanted pounds becomes more difficult. To counter this, forget deprivation diets and instead focus on whole foods. Whole foods are foods you can picture growing: whole grains, dairy, meat, fish, poultry, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts and healthy nut butters and oils. Eat five to six small meals per day, or one every three to four hours. Women should eat at least 1,500 calories per day and men should eat at least 1,800 calories per day. Be sure to eat frequent smaller meals...this will help rev your metabolism.

Are you combating cravings? Another obstacle in combating weight loss is mental plateaus. Cravings can attack at any time but are often worst in the first month of dieting due to the drastic changes and depletions in our diets. This is another reason that diets don't work. We always will crave what we can't have. If you want a cookie then choose a gourmet cookie that is well worth the extra calories. Boredom of food content can result in cheating.

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If you deny yourself the cookie you will most likely eat half a bag of grocery store cookies the next chance you get. By incorporating gourmet sweets on occasion you will feel more satisfied and motivated to stick with your healthier eating patterns during the rest of the week.

Adding a variety of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, will help prevent boredom. However, when it comes to sweets, stick to only a couple choices, as variety will only encourage the body to keep eating.

It is important to recognize that plateaus are part of life. This sense of failure can be redeemed through strategic tactics such as: keeping an exercise log to document achievements; by revisiting those old photos as a reminder of your progress; or by developing your own wellness team, such as a nutritionist, personal trainer and a psychotherapist to support you through these plateaus and help you determine the most efficient ways of eating and exercise for you. Most importantly, keeping a positive outlook will improve your chances for long term weight loss success.



Angela Pifer is a Certified Nutritionist, with a MS in nutrition from Bastyr University, in private practice, specializing in food sensitivities, emotional eating, digestive conditions, sports nutrition & weight loss. She founded **Nutrition Northwest Co** in 2005; the premier provider of sound nutrition and wellness advice in the Northwest with offices in Seattle and Kirkland. Angela has a unique approach to helping her patients create new healthier habits: offering customized nutrition programs that inspire & educate along with a high degree of support & accountability to help them become fit & fabulous from the inside out. www.NutritionNorthwest.com **Angela Pifer, CN 425-747-5282**