

LOSE the last 5 KILOS

How to beat a weight-loss plateau

Why are last few kilos the hardest to lose? There's nothing more frustrating than hitting a weight-loss plateau, but don't despair – we show you simple strategies to shift the weight, for good.



This is an edited extract from *Losing the Last 5 KG* by Susie Burrell, published by Hardie Grant Books (RRP \$19.99) and available in stores nationally.

Here's a common weight-loss scenario: you have an initial successful weight loss of 3-5 kilos, then nothing happens for weeks. What is your body doing, and how can you overcome that stubborn weight-loss plateau?

EXPECT A PLATEAU

Plateaus are part of your weight-loss process and they should be expected. They occur for a very simple reason. Your body likes to be stable and doesn't like losing weight. Once it has lost weight it works better, but it perceives weight loss as a negative energy state and will do everything it can to halt this loss. If your body thinks it's receiving too few kilojoules, or if weight has been lost rapidly, your body may slow its metabolism to conserve energy. It's the most common reason weight loss slows down when you reduce food intake over extended periods.

Your weight-loss plateau checklist

It's tough to keep going when you're not seeing results, but start with these five questions:

1 IS YOUR WEIGHT STABLE?

Take comfort from the fact that plateaus are a normal part of losing weight, and that the longer you are on a plateau, the more comfortable your body is becoming with its new weight.

2 ARE YOU EATING ENOUGH?

Following a very low-kilojoule or low-carb diet for extended periods may have pushed your metabolism to breaking point. So to kick-start things, try increasing your kilojoules slightly.

3 HAVE YOUR PORTION SIZES CREPT UP?

It can be surprising how portion sizes grow without you realising it – an extra serve of pasta or rice, or a larger piece of steak. Try cutting your portion size back by about 10 per cent.

4 DO YOU NEED TO CHANGE YOUR TRAINING INTENSITY?

As fitness improves, you have to go harder for additional weight loss. Try changing the type and duration of your training. Keeping your body guessing is key to leaving the plateau.

5 IS YOUR WEIGHT-LOSS GOAL REALISTIC?

This is perhaps the most important question to ask yourself. Do you feel fitter, stronger, happier and healthier, despite what the numbers on the scales say? Make health gain your goal – and weight loss the added bonus. ➤

Photos: iStock.

SHIFT YOUR MINDSET

Make conscious choices every day to shed established patterns.

While most of us know how to eat well and stay healthy, it's often easier said than done. People with busy lifestyles often put health and fitness on the back burner – but it's the small, daily food and exercise choices that determine successful weight management.

Fad diets, weight-loss challenges and boot camps may all have short-term benefits, but until you start viewing health and fitness as a way of life as opposed to a short-term commitment, you're likely to find yourself back where you started.

Motivation doesn't come from the latest fad diet, your partner, kids or workmates. It has to come from somewhere deep within, and ultimately become the thing that drives you to do the things your body needs for it to be at its best, every single day.

FOCUS ON SMALL CHANGES

It's not the occasional burger or chocolate that ruins your diet – it's your daily routine that manages your weight over the long term.

Too often we overcommit ourselves to unreasonable goals. We expect to lose weight in a week. We plan to exercise for hours on top of our work and family commitments. Plus we want to enjoy a buzzing social life, and to prepare restaurant-style dinners and make nutritionally balanced lunches for the following day. No wonder we fail – we set ourselves up for it!

Imagine if you could add just one or two positive health changes to your day – like snacking on veg, or keeping your dinner small – and you could feel just as good and be losing weight at the same time.

The good news is you can. While allocating some time and energy to losing weight will help get you started, the general rule of weight loss is to only adopt changes that realistically fit into your life. Sustaining these small changes over the long term adds up – and so will your weight loss.

When you're busy, it's easy to put health & fitness on the back burner

MAKE A CLEAR PLAN

Planning is the key to you enjoying long-term dietary success. It ensures you're never caught off guard and you'll always have healthy options on hand. And while some people may opt to spend hours each Sunday packing lunches, it doesn't have to be that labour intensive to get results.

Use this checklist to get ahead:

✓ Shop once a week or online

Set aside an hour each week to stock up on healthy dietary staples, or try ordering online if you find it hard or inconvenient to make it to the shops.

✓ Know your quick and easy meals

If you have canned tuna or salmon, eggs, cheese, pasta sauce, frozen vegetables, potatoes and tomatoes, you can make five or six different meals in 10 minutes or less.

✓ Set aside 20 minutes on Sunday to plan the week's meals

Make a note of each dish you plan to prepare so you know exactly what you need to do when you walk in the door.

✓ Keep snacks with you at all times

Each morning pack a couple of protein-rich snack foods to prevent impulse purchases during the day. >

You can prepare simple, healthy meals in less than 10 minutes!

CEMENT new HABITS

Becoming aware of a new habit takes three days, but it takes up to three months before an old habit is replaced, so be patient. Habits are crucial when it comes to developing sustainable diet and exercise changes. Developing a new habit is important, but 'cementing' it to become a long-term regular part of your day is vital.

The key habits to lock in for long-term weight management are:

1 ALWAYS EAT BREAKFAST

People who regularly eat a substantial breakfast lose more weight than those who have a small breakfast. Choose eggs or baked beans on wholegrain bread, natural muesli with fruit and yoghurt, or a liquid meal drink – and notice how much more satisfied you feel throughout the morning.

2 EAT 3 CUPS OF VEGIES & 2 FRUIT DAILY

Filling half your plate with vegetables or salad at lunch and dinner helps you tick this box, as does adding fruit to your breakfast and packing vegies like carrots for a daytime snack.

3 TAKE TIME TO SHOP EACH WEEK

If healthy food isn't in your house, how can you eat well? Schedule a set time to shop each week, or use online options if you prefer.

4 WALK 10,000 STEPS A DAY

A pedometer is a fun way to provide feedback on how many steps you're racking up every day. You can even download one to your mobile phone for free!

5 EAT AT THE TABLE

You'll eat more slowly – and often consume less food – as a result. Remember, eating should be an enjoyable, social experience, so take time out to do it properly.

6 ALWAYS CARRY A HEALTHY SNACK

Great options to keep on hand include nut or protein snack bars, hard fruit (such as an apple) or a few crackers, so you're never caught off guard.

7 DRINK GREEN TEA AFTER MEALS

Not only is green tea exceptionally high in healthy antioxidants, it can also help increase metabolic rate and curb sugar cravings.

8 ALWAYS CARRY A WATER BOTTLE

If it's in front of you, you'll drink it. Aim to drink at least two bottles of water each day instead of juice, cordial or soft drink, which are usually high in sugar. Add slices of fruit for flavour.



Maintain your motivation

To overcome your plateau and achieve your goals, you'll need strategies to maintain motivation.

Regularly remind yourself why you've committed to long-term diet and exercise changes. Some simple questions to boost motivation include:

- What are the benefits of keeping fit and healthy?
- How would my life be better if I felt better about my body?
- Am I a healthy role model for my children?
- Can I physically do all I would like to?

Refer back to these if you're going off track.

For your change to be sustainable, the reason you want the change has to come from within. You can't base it on wanting to look good for an event or to fit into a certain dress. The motivation has to become so entrenched that you can't imagine life without it. [hfg](http://hfg.com.au)