

5 Things That May Be Sabotaging Your Weight Loss



Malia Ray MD
Raydiant Wellness LLC

There's nothing worse than eating clean, minimizing or eliminating your favorite sweet or salty comfort food, and exercising, only to have the scale not budge.

Multiple factors affect weight. Day-to-day variation is most often a result of fluctuations in the amount of water within all of the compartments of your body. If you choose to indulge in a meal that is outside your normal eating habits and the scale is up three pounds the following day, you are likely just retaining extra water. Consistency with healthy eating over the next few days should bring that number back down.

If your program to lose weight involves exercise, particularly resistance training, and the scale is not budging or your weight initially went down but is trending up again several months later, that extra weight may be a result of muscle gains. In this instance, it would be helpful to note how your clothes are fitting or to follow measurements such as percent body fat, or circumference of hips, thighs, waist, and biceps. If your fitted clothes aren't feeling snug, that is a good sign that you are gaining lean mass.

If your weight loss has plateaued or you have not been able to initiate weight loss despite a few months of healthy behavior change, consider these 5 things:

- 1) Non-restorative Sleep
- 2) Chronic Stress
- 3) Haywire Hormones
- 4) Your Microbiome
- 5) Your Intake

Non-Restorative Sleep

Good quality sleep is essential for maintenance of good health. Lack of sleep or interrupted sleep affects our weight through multiple mechanisms.

Studies have shown that the less you sleep, the more you eat. While you may burn more calories by being awake longer, unless you are spending that extra time being active, you likely will not burn off all the extra calories. The hormone that makes you feel hungry is increased with sleep deprivation, while the hormone that makes you feel full and satisfied is decreased.

Have you ever noticed that you crave junk food when you are sleep deprived? Research has shown that high calorie foods have a stronger effect on the reward pathways in our brain when we have not had enough sleep. These reward pathways are the same pathways that are triggered with addictive substances such as cocaine. Not giving into cravings is inherently challenging, but it will be even more so when you are skimping on sleep (because of your brain, not willpower!).

Not only are you setting your body up to store more fat with the increase in calories and junk food, but your body will also hold on to more fat in a sleep deprived state. In two groups on the same low calorie diet, those who got adequate sleep lost mostly fat, while those who cut back on their sleep lost mostly lean mass (mostly muscle). This difference was noted with just one less hour of sleep each night! Unfortunately, catching up on sleep on the weekend did not change these outcomes.

Finally, sleep deprivation can result in elevations in our stress hormone, cortisol. The results of this are discussed next.

Chronic Stress

Acute stress can be helpful, giving us that drive or burst of energy that we need to complete a task or handle a frightening situation. Chronic stress, which usually occurs as a result of feeling out of control, adversely affects our health and can lead to weight gain or difficulty losing weight.

Like sleep deprivation, chronic stress tends to lead to an increase in calorie intake, usually in the form of high fat and high sugar foods. Cortisol, which is released during a stress response, results in an increase in appetite. Corticosteroids are cortisol-like drugs, and if you have ever needed a steroid prescription for a health problem, you are likely familiar with this increase in appetite.

Historically, our stressful situations were primarily physical in nature. Therefore, the release of cortisol results in the breakdown and release of the sugar that has been stored in the muscle and liver. This sugar in our blood stream will help us run from bears, but if it is not needed to create energy for physical activity, it will get stored in fat cells.

Fat cells, especially those around our bellies, are sensitive to cortisol. Therefore, when cortisol is high, the extra sugar in our blood will be preferentially stored in the fat cells around our bellies (called visceral fat). Not only is this resulting in weight gain, but visceral fat also causes an increased risk of metabolic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease.

Caffeine can also trigger a release of cortisol. If caffeine increases your heart rate or blood pressure, or leads to feeling anxious or jittery, it is likely spiking your cortisol. It is one piece of the puzzle that must be considered when weight loss has stalled.

Hormones

Hormones are a big category with a lot of different players. The main hormones that affect weight are insulin, thyroid hormone, and our sex hormones (estrogen, progesterone).

Let's start with insulin. Insulin is a hormone that is secreted after we eat. Without it, we would not be able to store the carbohydrates we eat to be used for energy at a later time. Pre-diabetes and type 2 diabetes are insulin resistant conditions, meaning our cells do not respond to insulin as well as they used to. When our cells don't respond to insulin, our body responds by secreting even more insulin. This excess in insulin leads to increased fat storage.

In pre-menopausal and peri-menopausal women, estrogen and progesterone fluctuate throughout the menstrual cycle. In the second half of the cycle, both estrogen and progesterone increase, but progesterone is the dominant hormone in this phase. In instances in which estrogen is elevated (known as estrogen dominance), or progesterone is decreased, weight gain occurs. Increased visceral fat is commonly seen with the transition into menopause.

Thyroid hormone is straightforward, as it is a key player in regulating metabolism. Therefore, when levels are low, as they are in hypothyroidism, metabolism will slow down.

It is important to realize that all of these hormones are interconnected. Estrogen dominance can suppress thyroid function, and elevated cortisol can reduce the conversion of thyroid hormone to its active form. Elevated cortisol will reduce the production of progesterone. Excess insulin from insulin resistance will increase the production of estrogen. All of these hormones must be considered together.

Your Microbiome

The gut microbiome refers to all of the microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, and fungi) that live throughout our gastrointestinal tract. Most of these are concentrated in our large intestine (colon).

There are bacterial species that are beneficial for us and species that are not beneficial. The non-beneficial bacteria cause inflammation. The bacteria that are beneficial produce a substance, known as short-chain fatty acids, that keep the colon healthy, reduce inflammation, improve brain function, and reduce cholesterol formation.

These short- chain fatty acids assist in weight management by regulating blood sugar, making you feel full with meals, and by altering metabolism. There is evidence in both mice and humans that demonstrates weight gain if the microbiome from a mouse or human that suffers from obesity is transplanted into the colon of a normal weight individual.

Our microbiome is kind of like a garden. The beneficial bacteria are the vegetable or flower plants in the garden and the inflammation causing bacteria are the weeds. Like a gardener, we should always be working to create an environment that will foster the growth and proliferation of the beneficial bacteria, while inhibiting the growth of the non-beneficial bacteria. If the inflammation causing bacteria are allowed to grow, they will inhibit the growth of the beneficial bacteria.

Exactly how we create this environment is beyond the scope of this guide, but one of the most important components is a high fiber diet. This is one of my favorite topics, so be sure to visit my Facebook group for further educational opportunities on this topic.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/lifestylehealthhacks>

Your Intake

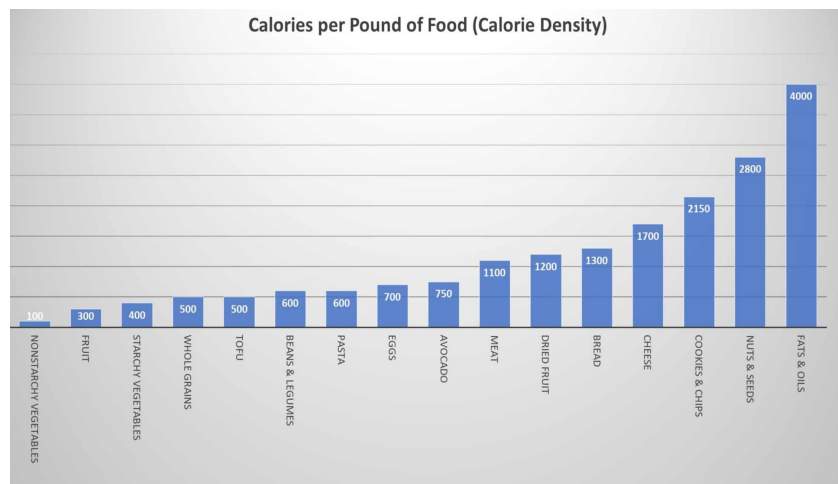
Fueling your body while trying to lose weight can be tricky. Weight loss requires eating less calories, but eating too few calories for a prolonged period of time can lead to unfavorable changes in your hormones and metabolism.

Weight loss also results in a decrease in the amount of calories that you burn at rest and with activity (unless you substantially increase your muscle mass). It takes less calories for your body to function when you are lighter.

Unfortunately, weight loss also leads to changes in the hormone that helps you feel full and satisfied after a meal. This change results in an increase in hunger.

Given this decrease in metabolism and increase in hunger, it is imperative to fill up on foods that are lower in calories, but still filling. No one wants to walk around feeling hungry all of the time. This is why diets that significantly restrict your portions tend to be unsustainable.

Having a knowledge of the calorie density of foods is critical when planning your meals to initiate or maintain weight loss. The more low calorie density foods that you ingest, the more successful you will be. Check out this calorie density chart.



Curious as to which factors are contributing to your difficulty losing weight?
Let's get you in for an initial assessment (you must live in Minnesota or be
able to be seen in our office in Minnesota). Call 507-242-8746 or email
malia@raydiantwellness.com.