

Plateau Busters

Add Variety To Your Workouts

You changed your habits and lost weight steadily, but after awhile, that progress halted. You've been stuck at the same weight for days, weeks, or even months. There's nothing more frustrating than trying your best, feeling like you are doing everything right, yet not making any progress towards your weight loss or fitness goals.

Before you give up, realize that weight loss takes work, and time, and isn't always perfect. But, there are plenty of ways you can re-energize your program (and motivation) to bust through your weight loss plateau.

What is a plateau?

If you've been exercising and cutting calories for several weeks, and you're no longer seeing the same results that you experienced in the beginning, then you've probably hit a plateau. This occurs when your progress comes to a standstill, but not necessarily moving backwards.

Incorporate some or all of the following suggestions to both prevent and overcome a weight loss plateau:

- **Incorporate variation into each workout.** Variety is critical because your muscles become very efficient at the exercises they are accustomed to doing. Switching things up or doing something different during each workout session is more challenging to your muscles. Changing your routine is crucial to keeping your body/muscles surprised. They'll have to work harder, you'll be challenged, and you'll burn more calories and build more lean muscle in the process. This concept should be applied to both aerobic exercise and strength training.
- **Change your cardio activity:**
 - Change the **type** of exercise you usually do. The possibilities of aerobic exercise are endless. If you walk, try cycling. If you take kickboxing, try the elliptical. Consider adding some of these possibilities to your routine: running, jogging, walking, elliptical machine, swimming, cycling, indoor exercise, outdoor exercise, hiking, fitness videos/DVDS, group fitness classes like kickboxing, aerobics, spinning, stair steppers, etc.—anything, just change it up!
 - Change the **duration** of your workouts. Try to increase your minutes as you become fitter, and occasionally, try a shorter (but more intense) workout.
 - Change the **intensity** of your workouts. This is something you can play with on a daily basis. This includes working at an incline or harder level, sprint work, distance work, maintaining intensity, or interval work (shifting between fast/hard and easy/recovery intervals).

Change your Strength Training Routine:

- Change the **mode** of exercise. If you are using machines, move to free weights. If you are using body weight, try resistance bands. If you are doing free weights, add a stability element like a BOSU ball or stability ball. Try doing exercises while balancing on one foot or switch between any and all of these.
- Change the **exercises** you actually do. If you have been doing chest press, change to a chest fly or use the pec deck machine. Think of an alternative exercise for each muscle group and you'll have an entirely new workout!
- Change your **resistance level** and/or number of **repetitions**. Be sure to increase your weight regularly. Make sure you are lifting to fatigue with each set. If you typically lift 12-15 reps, try doing 8-10 (with a higher weight) or vice versa. Play with your weight and reps in each set.

There are lots of ways to add variety to your workouts—and it's SO important that you do to continue losing weight and improving your fitness level. By always challenging yourself, you will avoid hitting a plateau in the first place, and overcome the one you're stuck in now.

Source: SparkPeople.com

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