

Welcome to the avoiding and breaking plateaus presentation. The purpose of this presentation is to provide the health and fitness professional with a brief overview on reasons for weight loss plateaus and strategies to help avoid or break these plateaus. After completing this section, the health and fitness professional will be able to do the following-- suggest appropriate goals within lifestyle and genetic parameters, confidently express the scientific rationale behind plateaus, and modify one's exercise programs to avoid and break body composition plateaus.

Hitting a plateau is a common occurrence. While some weight loss clients will report very low caloric intake and what appear to be adequate or high levels of activity, some clients will simply stop progressing and may even regress. Individuals may want to blame this lack of progress on a genetic predisposition. But the bottom line is that no human being is resistant to the law of thermodynamics. The human body will lose mass if caloric intake is consistently below caloric expenditure.

The physiology behind a plateau can be explained by the law of thermodynamics. The human body is constantly striving to be in an energy balance, and a plateau represents this balance. In simple terms, the calories taken in match the body's daily expenditure. This occurrence is true for both weight loss and weight gain clients. The difference is in how to handle a plateau.

One common contributor to weight loss plateaus is the physiological adaptation to the prescribed physical activity program. When a new client is getting regular exercise, the body will initially expend more calories during exercise. This is due to the body's inefficiency to meet the demands of the working muscles. Eventually this inflated rate of caloric expenditure will decrease as the body becomes somewhat accustomed to regular exercise, thus closing the originally developed caloric deficit.

Something else to consider is that as a person experiences a change in body composition and loses weight, that person's daily caloric need may decrease due to the less weight that they had to originally support. So if caloric intake remains the same but individual needs are reduced, not only can a plateau occur, but weight gain may soon follow. However, physiological plateaus can be avoided if measurements are taken in regular increments and program adjustments are made accordingly.

Another common reason that a weight loss plateau occurs is due to client noncompliance, whether intentional or unintentional. This can be in the form of underreporting caloric intake or overreporting

physical activity. Weighing and measuring food, keeping a food intake and physical activity log, and/or wearing a heart rate monitor to measure appropriate exercise intensity have all been proven tools to help individuals from hitting plateaus due to noncompliance.

The key to helping your clients overcome plateaus is to always keep in mind that a weight loss plateau results from calorie intake equaling calorie expenditure. Therefore, regardless of the number of calories, amounts of food, or exercise a client reports, adjustments must be made in order to make continual progress. To break a weight loss plateau, the weight loss client needs to put his or her body back into an energy deficit, meaning more calories are expended than are taken in. This can be achieved by decreasing caloric intake, increasing physical activity, or a combination of the two.

With this in mind, here are a few suggestions for breaking a weight loss plateau. Reassess daily caloric need. As a client loses weight or body fat, daily caloric need is decreased. If a person is smaller, they need fewer calories throughout the day than they did as a bigger person.

Have client measure and/or write down every bite of food and drink consumed. The act of recording food intake creates greater awareness of what is consumed and can be used along with its other benefits to the client's advantage to work through a plateau. And implement big changes to the exercise routine to increase the overall intensity of the exercise, and thus increasing caloric expenditure. Refer to your text for other suggestions on breaking a weight loss plateau.

To summarize, aiding clients through a body composition plateau is paramount to their long-term success. Half the battle when attempting to overcome a plateau is identifying the true underlying cause of it. Although plateaus occur for various reasons, they are all a result of calories ingested equaling calories expended. Applying the information in this course will not only help the health and fitness professionals accurately identify reasons for plateaus but can also induce progress and ultimately achieve the goal for every client.