

How to Break a Weight Plateau – part 4 – Dr. Eric Westman

How do you restart your weight loss on a low-carb diet if you stalled?

I am here with the expert on the subject, Dr. Eric Westman.

Some people they lose a lot of weight using a low-carb diet, but then they hit a plateau and they still have,

I don't know, 50 pounds to lose, 100 pounds to lose.

What do you do?

Right, well, there are several things to think about.

The first thing is that maybe

there have been more carbohydrates in the diet than before.

This is known as "carb creep" - creeping up meaning increasing.

So the first thing I would do if someone has hit a plateau

is to re-examine the foods that they are eating,

to make sure there hasn't been reintroduction of carbohydrates.

Commonly these may be in products

or in sauces that people are having at restaurant...

So you have to be very precise.

We have little candies that come in little containers

and we find people start eating those, they don't know why.

They are sugar-free gum, have some carbohydrate in them,

but I also want to mention that I do focus

on what the definition of a plateau or a stall is.

What is it?

Well, a stall or a plateau is where you have no weight loss, or no change in your body shape, your waist circumference for example, over a period of a couple months.

Okay, long time. Not just one week.

So some people come and they say "I haven't lost weight in two days.

I'm at a plateau."

No, that's not what a plateau is.

So, as long as there is some weight loss every week, or some change, then don't worry even if it's extremely slow,

but that's still not a plateau.

But so these other artificial sweeteners and increasing in carbohydrates,

I do think that calories do come into play,

so that some people are still maintaining a habit

of eating more than they really need.

So someone has hit a plateau.

One thing I do think about it is the amount of calories that they are eating.

A calorie is a measure of energy

and if you have lost 100 pounds,

so you went from 400 pounds to 300 pounds,

you are eating the same calorie amount, energy amount.

You may stop losing weight.

So a lot of people continue to eat because of habit.

They've always been told to eat breakfast, so they eat breakfast,

even though they really don't need it.

So we do a lot of teaching about how you should only eat when you're hungry and talking about what hunger is.

You now, if someone has been stress eating or emotional eating, they're eating to resolve some stressful situation.

We have to teach new ways to resolve that other than having food that has calories in it.

People always say that you need to eat breakfast to lose weight, or it is a good idea to eat breakfast every day.

It's a good habit... don't you agree?

So those studies haven't been done under a low carbohydrate diet circumstances.

No, I think there's a lot of variation and you don't have to eat breakfast every day.

You don't have to have three meals a day.

You eat when you're hungry.

And this can be turned in many different ways, intermittent fasting,

just have one meal a day or however you want to say it,

but I don't think that you have to have--

that most people don't have to have three to five meals a day.

Now some people end up eating five meals a day, because they truly are hungry.

So if you have diabetes, if your metabolism is very sick, you may feel like you need to eat frequently,

but what happens is you don't eat much each time you eat.

So the body corrects for how frequently you eat,

by reducing the amount that you eat.

So you're basically saying to become mindful of this

and stop eating if you're not hungry.

Not hungry, don't eat!

Sounds so wise, doesn't it?

Eat when hungry!

Well, you drink only when you are thirsty, right?

Well, some people drink because people tell them

that you need to drink regularly.

Same thing, right?

Well I'm not so sure that that's so important either.

So in our clinic we say, "Eat when hungry and drink when thirsty."

Yes, personally I say the same things.

So I'm just saying that it's a common argument

that you need to eat every three hours,

you need to make sure to get enough fluids and all that.

Well, you could say, "But how is that working for you?"

Not very great.

So when you are at a weight loss plateau,

you could watch out for carb creep,

make sure that you are not adding a lot of carbs compared to before

and you should also be mindful of calories

if you are eating when not hungry.

Apart from that... more?

A few more things to think about in terms of the diet...

Some of the protein you eat can turn into carbohydrates.

So it may be that you're eating a little too much protein
and not enough fat.

So we talked about that, we--

We talked about that in general

and then we also talked about how you can measure that on your own.

So how do you know?

Well, you can measure your blood glucose, your blood sugar after you eat protein
and if the sugar goes up,

some of that protein is being turned into sugar.

So that can actually slow you down.

So we prefer people to think of this as a low-carb high-fat diet,
not a low-carb high-protein diet.

So what's the proper amount of protein?

That's an excellent question... I don't think we really know.

In fact the guidelines that are available are all over the place.

And maybe the body can figure it out on its own even.

-How? -We measure--

So in our clinical setting, we measure the body composition.

We have the fat mass and the muscle mass

and it's all just fine when people are told just to eat real foods.

And actually I think true hunger measures the amount of protein.

So if you take away the sugars and all that,
your body will tell you to eat any protein when it needs it.

But that's the ideal world without advertisements,
without fake foods that are highly processed foods.

In general a range from 0.5g per kilogram
to 1.5g per kilogram of body weight
is what's recommended in terms of protein to eat for the day.

Can too little protein be a problem?

Well, too little protein can be a problem,
if it's making your muscle mass go down.

So protein is in your muscles and if you don't have enough protein,
you'll start using your own muscle to generate the protein.

So the guidelines are there--

The lowest amount is actually designed
to make sure people don't have abnormal protein deficiency syndrome.

So they're designed from a level of world poverty,
what's the minimum amount people can have,
so while you may be in that range,
it may not be the optimal amount of protein.

So I don't think we really know the optimal amount,
but if you're having too much,
it may interfere with the ketosis and the fat burning.

And when you're on a low-carb diet, you're eating fewer carbs

and that means that it is easy to add more protein.

So, it's probably, the way I see it, it's probably easier to get a bit on the high side when it comes to protein-- Rather than too low.

Not very likely that you're going to end up too low. Right?--

-Right. --on a low-carb diet.

In my clinic I don't have people formally calculating that or writing it down.

I just have them eat 'till they are feeling in fullness.

The entire lifestyle is important.

I have some people who come to my clinic and are totally sedentary.

They are not doing any activity, any exercise

and while you can lose weight with a low-carb diet without exercise, exercise will help you get through a plateau.

So my philosophy is I don't make people exercise at first,

especially if they don't want to or don't feel like it,

but if they are at a plateau, we're trying to help them through that,

What exercise does is it increases the metabolism a little bit.

And as long as you don't overcompensate by eating more

to compensate for the exercise,

that will help get through the plateau...

Having more exercise.

Okay, so any other problems

that could lead to a weight loss plateau or a stall?

Well someone's had a plateau,

I'll also screen for any new introduction of artificial sweeteners, or even if someone's been on artificial sweeteners all along, I don't fully understand why, but they can start creating a problem.

And it could be as little as one serving a day.

So some people say, "I'm only having one or two servings".

That may be enough to cause a plateau.

So I would recommend, if you are using artificial sweeteners, to try a week or two off the artificial sweeteners entirely to see if that doesn't break the plateau.

Anything else?

In the medical clinic that I'm in,

I'll find people being put on other medications by other doctors.

So what kind of medications can be a problem for losing weight?

Doctors will put people on diabetes medicines.

That actually make people gain weight, even though the weight is causing the diabetes.

So what kind of medications--?

Well, things like insulin, things like diabetic oral medications that increase the insulin secretion inside the body.

So, I would screen for those medications.

Other medicines like beta blockers, high blood pressure medicines, steroid medicines, if someone is on prednisone, which is an oral steroid or someone gets injections into their joints.

Interestingly a knee injection for knee pain
if it has a steroid medicine in it, that can cause weight gain
and would cause a plateau.

So different kinds of medications, carb creep, calories--

Artificial sweeteners.

--Artificial sweeteners, drugs...

That's quite a list.

If you work through all these things,
do everyone stop losing weight?

Well, and then the increasing activity, exercise,
getting back into a lifestyle--

I think another common source of medications is the antidepressants.

And what made me think of that is a whole another domain
that's not related to diets or activity,
but it's stress management...

So if some people are eating all the right things,
they are doing activity,
but they're under a lot of stress either at work or home,
and that can make things stop.

So we will focus on stress management.

I will send some people to psychologists,
if it is to that degree that they need professional help.

How about sleeping... talking about stress?

Sleeping well is really important
for a proper metabolism and for weight loss.

And if you don't get enough sleep, it can increase the stress levels
and cause all sorts of problems.

Along those lines if the sleep problem is from a condition called "sleep apnea",
where you stop breathing for a while in the middle of the night,
that's something to be checked for and can be treated in a different way,
there's a stopgap measure
called a continuous positive airway pressure machines,
or CPAP machine, can help.

Of course weight loss is the ultimate treatment for sleep apnea,
but it's important to think about proper sleep as well.

So lots of good tips for people to restart their weight loss.

Thanks so much.

You're welcome.

And we are doing more of these videos on low-carb
and common problems and things to think about,
so you can find all these videos at DietDoctor.com