

# Nutrition for Weight Loss

By Chris Sandel

[www.seven-health.com](http://www.seven-health.com)

For what seems like forever we have been told that if you want to lose weight you need to focus on calories in versus calories out. Weight gain is about two things – you have either eaten too much food or you haven't done enough exercise (or a combination of both). Weight loss is simple, it is just about altering these variables so that you create a calorie deficit and the weight will drop off. And because you lose weight, you will now be much healthier.

This is what we have been told but I am afraid to say it is wrong. Let's look at what happens when you use this method to lose weight.

To keep things simple let's say your body currently uses 2,000 calories a day. This will fluctuate depending on what you have going on during a day (exercise, studying, a stressful work day) but for this explanation let's assume you are using 2,000 calories every day.

You decide that you are going to lose some weight by eating less. You start to skip breakfast or have just a salad for lunch, or decide that you won't eat anything after 6pm in the afternoon. Your new found eating habits mean that you are now only taking in 1,600 calories a day, creating a calorie deficit of 400 calories.



In the beginning, despite reducing your calories, your body needs to keep up with the demands of 2,000 calories a day. You start to release more stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, which are catabolic, breaking down your body so that it can be converted into energy. Some of it will be from that fat you want to get rid of, but the majority will come from lean muscles, tissue, bones, organs – the stuff you don't want to be breaking down.

Stress hormones also suppress thyroid function and metabolism in general. Your body wants to do its best to keep you alive and it realizes that there is now a deficit in calories coming in compared to what you need to function. These hormones tell your body that it needs to slow down the rate that you use nutrients. It does so by turning down some functions and turning off others.

Over time your body readjusts so now it is only burning 1600 calories a day. It is at this point that you notice that fantastic weight loss has now stopped. Despite eating less than you were before you are now not losing any weight.

So you decide that you have only been dealing with one side of the equation. You fixed your diet but you hadn't done anything about your exercise routine. So you decide to get fit as this will help to get rid of those extra pounds you still have hanging around.

You start doing boot camp, spinning, running, or whatever high intensity exercise takes your fancy so that you can get a sweat on. You go to the gym five days a week because you are dedicated and care about your health. You are going to work this weight off and reveal the new sexier you.



The new exercise regime means that you are now burning an extra 400 calories a day. You keep to your same eating habits, are back to having a calorie deficit and once again the weight starts coming off. The body previously had to do all of its tasks on 1600 calories. You have now increased your energy output by 400 calories each day. This means your body now has to do all of its tasks (excluding exercise) using 1200 calories.

Once again this means your body has to use more stress hormones to catabolize your body so you can get through. And just like before your body realizes that it can't go on like this, there is not enough energy coming in to meet the demands. So your body adjusts and shuts down even more functions so that it can become as thrifty as possible. It has now balanced the books again and is now able to function on 1200 calories.

In this situation your body switches its priorities to survival instead of thriving. It shuts down anything it thinks is about long-term health so it can deal with getting you out of harms way (which is how it perceives your current 'health' regime). It suppresses your digestive system, your immune system, your reproductive system – these all use too many calories to run and aren't important right now. All it cares about is getting enough energy to your cells so you can make it through the day.

So you are now eating less than you ever have before and you are exercising five days a week. You are absolutely exhausted and once again you weight has plateaued. You could try eating even less but you already feel hungry most of the day. The thought of another day a week at the gym fills you with dread. You are trapped because you know that you can't keep this up but don't want to go back to how things were before.



I have clients who have been eating 900 calories a day for years but are still putting on weight. I have a client who has been eating 600 calories a day but their weight is stable. Unfortunately this is the only thing that is stable – they are an emotional wreck, have constant acid reflux, their hair is falling out in big clumps and it is rare that they can sleep for more than 3 hours at a time. And no they are not stick thin or have the 'perfect body'; in their eyes they are "chubby" and "could do with losing some weight." Your body is a highly tuned feedback mechanism. It is constantly updating and making changes based on the messages it is being sent from the outside world –messages based on how much you eat, how often

you eat, how much exercise you do, what emotions you are feeling. It wants to keep you alive and this is its main priority; it doesn't care about your infatuation with looking thin or having abs.

There is a healthy way to lose weight and it involves seeing weight gain for what it really is; it is a symptom of everything else going on in your life. It will improve, as the other systems of your body get better. It is not something that you deal with in isolation, when it is dealt with this way your long-term health and metabolism suffers.