



The Top 5 Reasons Why People Are Unsuccessful Losing Weight

Dr. Thomas L. Halton

Introduction

With 2 out of 3 Americans overweight or obese, losing weight is on just about everyone's agenda. Billions of dollars are spent each year on gyms, trainers, books, and commercial weight loss programs by those desperately trying to reduce their body fat. In fact, at any given time, 46% of women and 33% of men are trying to lose weight (1).

The unfortunate truth is that, as a nation, we are very good at putting on weight but not very good at taking it off. Clinically relevant weight loss is considered losing 10% of your body weight and keeping it off for one year. The research literature shows that 8 out of 10 dieters will fail to achieve this goal (2).

People want to lose weight for a variety of reasons: to improve their health, have more energy, be more attractive, lower their risk of disease, and to generally feel better about themselves. These are all awesome goals that are worth working towards. But why then do so many of us fail? Why is losing weight so difficult?

I am not afraid to say that I have learned the answer to these questions. I have been helping people lose weight for over 15 years. I have worked with men and women, teenagers and 80 year olds, people that want to lose 5 pounds and people that want to lose 200 pounds. I've truly seen it all.

I've also spent a lot of time in the classroom studying exercise physiology, nutrition, and weight loss. I hold Masters Degrees in both Exercise Science and Human Nutrition and a Doctorate in Nutrition from Harvard University. I am a Licensed Nutritionist in the State of New York, an ACE Certified Personal Trainer, and a Certified Nutrition Specialist through the American College of Nutrition.

I've also conducted nutrition research that has appeared in the nation's leading journals, including *The New England Journal of Medicine* and *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*.

My academic and clinical experience has taught me a lot about weight loss. Some of what you read here may be surprising to you. However, when you truly understand a problem, you are 50% of the way toward solving it. So without further ado, here are the top 5 reasons why people are unsuccessful at long term weight loss.

Reason #5: Not Initiating A Strength Training Program

Once we hit our 25th birthday, we start to lose our muscle mass at the rate of 1% each year. This is a natural part of the aging process and is highly relevant for weight maintenance. Each pound of muscle burns roughly 50 calories per day, whether you exercise or not. As we go from our 20's to our 30's and 40's, it is very natural to steadily gain weight since we are burning fewer calories each year. A well designed strength training program not only stops this loss of muscle, but adds to it, so you burn more calories each and every day.

Furthermore, the human body has developed amazing defense mechanisms to prevent us from losing weight. You must remember that we evolved in times of famine and food scarcity. Those of us who survived to pass on our genes gained body fat quickly and lost it slowly. As a defense mechanism, when we lose weight without strength training, half of the weight we lose is fat, while the other half is muscle. Our body does not want to let its fat stores get too low, too fast, so it burns muscle to spare the fat. This results in a lowered metabolic rate and eventually any weight lost is regained. When you add strength training to your weight loss plan, you preserve your lean body mass and lose almost pure fat. This results in permanent weight loss.

Reason #4: Unrealistic Expectations

Many people have completely unrealistic expectations for their rate of weight loss. They feel that if they are not losing 3, 4, or even 5 pounds a week that their plan isn't working and they give up. Nonsense! A pound of fat is 3,500 calories. To lose a pound of fat in a week you have to create a daily deficit of 500 calories. This is not easy to do at all. My weight loss goal for my female clients is $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pound a week and for men it is 1 pound a week. Three quarters of a pound doesn't sound like much, but it adds up to 3 pounds in a month, 18 pounds in 6 months, and 36 pounds in a year. People who are successful losing weight lose it at this rate.

Reason #3: Not Getting Enough Cardiovascular Exercise

Many people who are trying to lose weight hit the treadmill for 20 minutes a few times a week and expect to lose weight. It won't happen. You will need to do more cardio than this, a lot more. Both my clinical experience and the research literature have taught me this. The Women's Health Study is a prospective investigation of 39,876 women out of Harvard University. In 15

years of follow-up, the only women in this cohort that did not gain weight as they aged were those that engaged in cardiovascular exercise for 60 minutes per day (3).

The National Weight Control Registry is an interesting cohort study based out of the University of Colorado and Brown University Medical School. To join this study, the member has to have lost at least 30 lbs and kept it off for at least a year. There are over 4,000 members in this study. The average amount of cardio for these successful losers is 60 minutes per day (4). To lose weight and keep it off, cardiovascular exercise must become a daily habit.

Reason #2: Following A Low Fat Diet

Many who are seeking to manage their weight choose a low fat diet plan. Unfortunately, this strategy sets them up for failure. First of all, low fat diets simply don't work long term. In a summary of the research literature, replacing 10-15% of dietary fat with carbohydrate results in a modest weight loss of 2-9 lbs over the short term (6 months). However, over the long term (1 or more years) this weight is regained and there is no association between percent of dietary fat and body weight (5).

Why is this the case? For starters, dietary fat promotes satiety. It helps you feel full. Secondly, dietary fat helps to stabilize the blood sugar. Swings in blood sugar common with low fat, high carbohydrate eating patterns result in a reactive hypoglycemia that drives down blood sugar below fasting levels and results in increased hunger and overeating.

The most convincing evidence that low fat diets do not result in long term weight loss has been indirectly conducted right here in America over the past few decades. Our percent of calories from fat has steadily dropped from 40% of calories to 34% in the last 30 or so years. Have we gotten thinner? Not at all, obesity rates have skyrocketed in this time period.

Reason #1: Eating The Wrong Type Of Carbohydrate

The human body is designed for blood sugar stability. For the vast majority of our 10,000 years on this planet, the foods we consumed caused a slight increase in our blood sugar, and a tiny release of insulin to lower it back down. This is the way our body was intended to work. In the past 100 years or so, we have dramatically changed our sources of carbohydrate. We now

eat carbohydrates that cause a sharp rise in our blood sugar. To deal with this peak, we must release a giant dose of insulin.

This large release of insulin causes a number of problems for those trying to lose weight: 1) Insulin is an anabolic hormone and actually creates new fat cells. 2) Insulin inhibits the enzyme lipoprotein lipase, an enzyme that tells your muscles to burn fat. 3) When insulin is released in a large dose, it does its job too well and your blood sugar actually drops below fasting levels. This results in ravenous hunger and repeatedly eating food that your body does not need.

Some carbohydrate foods result in a mild increase in blood sugar and insulin levels as nature intended; these are known as low glycemic load carbohydrates. Other carbs cause a sharp spike in blood sugar and insulin levels; they are known as high glycemic load carbohydrates. In my experience, eating too many high glycemic load carbohydrates is the major reason why people are not successful in their weight loss efforts.

Conclusion

Losing weight is not easy, but is more than possible. I feel that the vast majority of those who fail simply lack the knowledge of how the human body gains and loses fat. When you combine this knowledge with some discipline, hard work, and dedication, you can get in the best shape of your life, at any stage of your life.

If I can be of any assistance to you during your journey, please don't hesitate to contact me at www.drtoomhalton.com.

Our Newsletter

Dr. Halton publishes a free newsletter that contains useful information on weight loss, nutrition, exercise science, and preventative health. It is published bi-monthly and is delivered directly to your email address. Content includes: feature articles, questions and answers, product reviews, book reviews, research updates, and much more! You can sign up for our newsletter at www.drtoomhalton.com/newsletter.html.

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About Dr. Thomas L. Halton

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Dr. Halton has been published in the nations leading journals, including *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, *The Journal of the American College of Nutrition*, and *The Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. His research has been featured on CNN, CBS Health Beat, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, US News and World Report, Time Magazine, Newsweek, Men's Health, and dozens of other international media outlets.

Dr. Halton is the owner of Triad Nutrition and Fitness, a nutrition counseling and personal training company based in Long Island, NY. He is the author of three books: *The Weight Loss Triad*, *Maximize Your Health*, and *Life On The Triad*. His experience also includes teaching graduate courses at the University of Bridgeport and Simmons College, working as a

research, corporate, and medical consultant, lecturing on health and fitness, and as a reviewer for several peer reviewed research journals.