

Why Exercise is not great for weight loss

Summary: While exercise alone may not be the most effective method for significant weight loss, it is indispensable for reducing body fat, preserving muscle mass, and maintaining weight loss over the long term. When combined with a balanced and sustainable diet, exercise becomes an essential component of a healthy lifestyle. Ok before I get you not to exercise the good news is that if you've lost weight, exercise can also help keep it off when it's used along with watching calorie intake weight maintenance (see weight loss registry).



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I always emphasize to my clients the importance of following a sound diet if they want to see the scale budge. It's crucial to adopt a dietary approach that can be sustained for the rest of their lives. While exercise is undoubtedly beneficial for overall health, it may not be particularly effective in facilitating weight loss. It may lead to modest weight reduction, but its impact is generally not as impressive as one might expect.

However, exercise plays a significant role in reducing body fat, especially unhealthy visceral (abdominal) fat. Both aerobic and muscular training have been shown to decrease body fat while simultaneously building and preserving muscle mass. This phenomenon of gaining muscle while losing fat contributes to the scale not showing rapid weight loss during exercise.

Another reason why people, especially women, may not experience weight loss despite exercising is related to their dietary habits. Research indicates that individuals tend to consume more food after exercising, either due to a perception of having burned a substantial amount of calories and feeling deserving of indulgence or because of increased hunger levels. A study from 2009 demonstrated that people increased their food intake following exercise (refer to study). Similarly, a review of studies conducted in 2012 revealed that individuals often overestimate the energy expended during exercise and subsequently consume more calories, believing they can afford to do so.

Additionally, the "constrained model" of energy expenditure suggests that the relationship between physical activity and its effect on the human body is not linear. There may be a limit to how much energy the body is willing to expend, regardless of the level of physical activity. In other words, our bodies may actively resist our efforts to lose weight. This concept highlights the complex interplay between exercise, energy expenditure, and weight loss.

Now, before discouraging you from exercising, here's the good news: if you have already lost weight, incorporating exercise into your routine can greatly assist with weight maintenance (refer to the weight loss registry). When exercise is combined with monitoring calorie intake, it becomes a valuable tool in sustaining weight loss and preventing weight regain (refer to the Weight Loss Registry).

A **Cochrane Review** of the best available research found that while exercise led to only modest weight loss, study participants who exercised more (even without changing their diets) saw a range of health benefits, including reducing their blood pressure and triglycerides in their blood. Exercise reduces the risk of **Type 2 diabetes**, stroke, and heart attack.