

Why Am I Losing So Little Weight?

At work, a group of us have started a group weight-loss competition modeled on "The Biggest Loser." So, for the past six weeks I have been watching what I eat and I've been walking on the treadmill three or four times per week. But I've only lost four pounds! I'd like to lose at least 12 more pounds. What can I do to see results faster?

A. First, congratulate yourself because a four-pound weight loss may not be your end goal, but it's a solid accomplishment-especially if you can avoid gaining the weight back. If you can lose more weight and also maintain that loss, even better. Sure, you want to see greater weight loss, but try to resist berating yourself when you are actually experiencing a successful result. Remember, it's only the beginning of your new and healthier lifestyle! (And it's vital to appreciate that your new behaviors are the beginning of a longterm lifestyle change, rather than a quick fix to lose weight and then a return to the same old habits.)

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Seeing dramatic results quickly is seductive. But ask yourself this: How many people do you know who went on a fad diet or underwent a serious weight-loss regimen for a week at a spa, only to gain the weight back?

Quick, drastic weight loss should not be your emphasis. Make your goal gradual, healthful weight loss that can be sustained over time. The good news is that you are on your way.

Now, how do you expedite the weight-loss process?

There could be several reasons why you aren't losing more weight faster. Most likely, you are burning more calories from walking while eating fewer calories from smarter food choices, but not making as dramatic a change in overall calories, or energy balance, as you could. You don't mention how strictly you are following your healthful eating plan. Are you counting calories? You also don't give details on how long you are walking, nor how fast. Both are factors that will influence your overall calorie burn.

If you controlled your caloric intake a bit more carefully and exercised more often, for longer or at a higher intensity, to accumulate a greater weekly calorie burn, you can probably get greater results.

Assess your current diet and fitness plan

Burning more calories than you take in will lead to weight loss. But if you are only vaguely monitoring your intake, you may not be cutting out as many calories as you think-and that can slow down your weight loss.

There are many ways to cut calories and a number of diets to choose from. But whether it's a low-carb, low-fat diet or some other approach, all diets work because they reduce how many calories you take in. Sometimes you may not be aware of the caloric cut if you are instead focusing on avoiding carbs or certain banned foods. But research shows that all diets ultimately reduce how many calories you eat, even if you are not consciously tallying them up after each meal.

The 2009 position statement from the American Dietetic Association on weight management recommends reducing your calorie intake by 500 to 1,000 calories per day to achieve a weight loss of 1 to 2 pounds per week.

To do this you first need to figure out, on average, how many calories you normally take in. You can do so by keeping a food diary and looking up the calorie count for everything you eat each day (You can look up foods in the USDA nutrient database CalorieCount.com).

Eat less

You only need to log your meals for three days or so to get an estimate (although tracking more days is more accurate). Once you know your average energy intake, subtract 500 to 1,000 calories from your total and aim to eat that amount. If "watching what you eat" up till now means that you were simply avoiding desserts or saying "no" to seconds, then assessing what you eat more carefully may help you discover ways to reduce your caloric intake even more.

If you're not a calorie counter, experiment with other ways to control portion sizes. You might try a commercial diet plan that provides meals, if that's within your budget. Or stick to frozen dinners, which will allow you to keep tabs on the exact number of calories you are eating.

Regular exercise can add to the caloric deficit that you need to create to lose weight, but the key to seeing results from exercise is consistency. The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommends doing at least 60 minutes per day of moderate- to vigorous-intensity activity on most days of the week, and up to 90 minutes to prevent weight regain after weight loss. You wrote that you are currently walking three to four days a week. So, bump it up to five or more days. Or do other activities like cardio machines or aerobic dance classes. If your walks only last 30 minutes and are at a moderate pace, start increasing your mileage and/or speed in small amounts to boost the calorie burn. Keep a daily physical activity diary to help monitor your progress.

For a specific regimen to follow, check out the food and fitness plan I devised for MSN, [Lose 10 Pounds in 5 Weeks](#) . The program includes an easy-to-follow, progressive five-week walking routine.

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