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Why Is It So Difficult to Keep Lost Weight From Returning?

Anyone who has lost weight and has finally reached the nirvana of hitting their goal and can now fit into those lovely jeans which have been hiding in the back of the wardrobe for years knows the harder part is actually keeping that body fat off. It's true to say that the act of losing and gaining fat changes the way our brains regulate our body weight.

Enter the 'set point theory' - the idea that our bodies are always trying to get back to its perception of normal. It's why slim people can seemingly eat whatever they want and never have a weight problem, and it's also why it's so damn difficult to keep weight off after losing it.



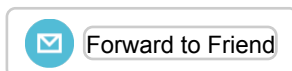
If you've never really restricted your intake or needed to lose weight, then you eat far too much for a few weeks, the reason you don't gain body fat is because your body will 'turn up' your metabolism, it'll decrease your hunger and generally do whatever it needs to do in order to shed the extra energy without storing it. Continue over eating, and you will of course start to gain weight, though. On the other hand, if you've recently lost a fair bit of weight, your body will 'turn down' your metabolism, increase hunger and do whatever it can do to conserve energy and store as much as possible in order to get back to the weight it thought was normal; and it does this more if you've lost more weight.

This is cruel and unfair, hey? And how long do you have to hang on with this for? Well, the jury is out on that one. I have heard it can take seven years (!!!!) to make a new set point and for our bodies to get used to being at a certain weight. Remember this works both ways - if you put on weight during pregnancy, for example, you should get back to your old set point and maintain it easily enough, if you do the right things.

I've also heard arguments about never reaching a lower set point - the argument being that by the time your set point has had a good chance to change, your new way of eating (i.e. less) is a complete habit, so perhaps that is what's helping you maintain your weight. Apparently one might always need to eat 5-10% less than someone else who didn't have to diet to get to the same weight as you in order to maintain your weight loss, but be careful not to go too low (less is not always better) as this could ramp up your bodies 'conservation mode' even further. This is especially relevant to people who are constantly dieting and going up and down; anecdotal evidence suggests each time you lose weight, your bodies protective mode and desire to reach its usual set point gets stronger; explaining why those of you who have dieted on and off for years now find you have to do more and more extreme or restrictive diets to get the same results you'd have got from simply brushing up your diet when you were a younger, less experienced dieter.

Until next time, enjoy staying healthy!

Best wishes,



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