



Why people don't lose weight

Losing body fat is a goal of 80-90% of members who join health clubs. It sounds simple in theory: join a gym, exercise some more, eat a little better, and presto. However, in reality more people stay the same shape than get lean. Steve Jack investigates why.

Travelling around the UK the last few years and going into gyms and health clubs, it has become apparent that many members and clients are not following a fat-loss formula that works. Clearly, if the food pyramid, fat burning zones, and abdominal cradles worked, then people would not leave health clubs or stop working with personal trainers. Let's examine the key areas that people need to focus on and where they are going wrong:

1. Progressive nutrition
2. Progressive resistance training
3. Progressive cardiovascular training

Nutrition

80% of the way your client and members look and feel is down to nutrition. So let's start with this one. Food is the most potent substance that clients put into their body, and they do it every day, several times a day. Every time your clients eat, it creates a series of hormonal responses, and hormones are hundreds of times stronger than drugs. Either they control hormones, or hormones control them. Think of it as taking very strong medicine each and every day; this can have a good, bad, or indifferent effect on their body for the next four hours or so.

The insulin-glucagon axis

Carbohydrate gets metabolised and broken down into sugar during the digestion process. Some foods break down and release their sugar quite quickly compared to others (for example, potatoes), creating a spike in blood sugar levels. This spike in blood sugar then triggers insulin to get released from the pancreas. Insulin is the master hormone for weight management since it commands the body to convert excess sugar in the bloodstream to fat. Insulin is also a storage hormone. Its job is to take excess glucose from dietary carbohydrate and excess amino acids from dietary protein and store them in the adipose tissues as fat. It is helpful to think of insulin as a locking hormone: not only does it store fat in the adipose tissue, it locks that stored fat up so that it can't be released. If insulin is a storage and locking hormone, then glucagon, insulin's biological opposite, is a mobilisation hormone. Glucagon's primary job is to release stored carbohydrates, in the form of glucose, from the liver. Once released by glucagon, this glucose enters the

bloodstream, and helps maintain the tight balance of blood sugar required for the brain to function adequately. Since insulin drives down blood sugar, and glucagon restores blood sugar levels, the communication and ongoing balance of these two hormones is critical for weight management. Remember the release of insulin is stimulated by carbohydrates, especially high glycaemic carbohydrates. On the other hand, glucagon is stimulated by dietary protein. So the critical hormone balance of insulin and glucagon depends upon two things. One is the size of the meal your client eats – excess calories stimulate the secretion of insulin. The other is the ratio of protein to carbohydrate in each meal – get the ratios right each and every meal, and clients will begin to stabilise these hormones and therefore fat storage.

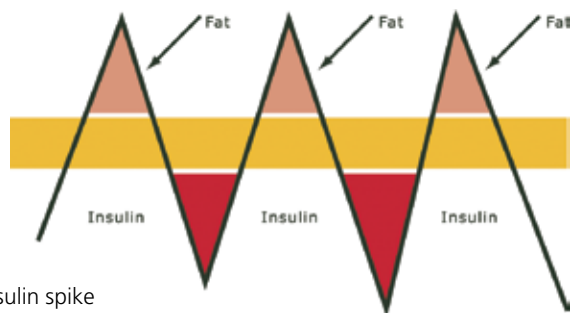
However, what tends to happen is that clients punch in the wrong hormonal code – typically a pasta or sandwich meal: high carbohydrate, low protein. If clients eat this at lunch at 12:00, by 15:00 they can barely keep their eyes open. Why does this happen?

The excess carbohydrate and lack of sufficient protein in that meal has generated an overproduction of insulin. The insulin not only reduces blood sugar levels – thereby depriving the brain of its only source of energy, but it also prevents the replenishment of blood sugar from the liver. As blood sugar levels drop, the brain begins to fade.

Within three to four hours after their pasta meal or sandwich, the brain is getting desperate for energy (even though they have lots of stored sugar in the liver desperate to get out). But this massive amount of stored carbohydrate can't be released into the blood stream because the high carbohydrate meal they ate drove insulin levels up and glucagon levels down.

Since glucagon levels remain low, your client can't replenish blood sugar from their own internal stored carbohydrate in the liver. So their body tells them that they need a sugar hit, and they reach for the chocolate bar, coffee, or packet of crisps as a source of carbohydrate for the brain. Then the vicious cycle starts all over again. Not only that but the insulin has told the body to take all excess sugar floating around and convert it to fat.

So not only are clients sleepy, but they are getting bigger! Every time they spike their insulin due to their food choices, they end up converting all excess sugar to fat, and in the



Insulin spike

process get tired and sleepy. So get them eating in the right macronutrient ratio, and get them eating low-glycaemic carbohydrates. The ideal ratio for long-term weight management and control is 40% carbohydrate, 30% protein, and 30% fat. Most people start the day off on the wrong foot and eat a high carbohydrate breakfast, such as cereal, immediately creating an overstimulation of insulin and the conversion of blood sugar to fat.

Overeating

The ideal amount of calories to eat per serve to keep clients from storing fat is around 300-500 calories. The challenge is most people eat around 650-800 calories per serve for three meals if they are eating 2,000 calories a day. These extra calories also cause an insulin spike, further compounding the fat conversion issue. The body can only process 300-500 calories at a time, so the rest just gets converted and clients get fatter.

Body fat is just stored food. The key for fat loss and weight management is to only eat what your body needs to feed the machine to get about its daily activities. The challenge for most people is that they feed themselves way more than what their body really needs to survive on; much of this is down to simple food choices. So never eat more than 500 calories per serve, and taper them down through the day so there is less calories in the evening compared to the morning.

Meal timing strategy

Most clients' meal strategy is upside down. They have probably heard that breakfast is the most important meal of the day yet they do not set themselves up properly by either skipping it or eating too many carbohydrates by eating just toast or cereal. So the body either goes into starvation mode if they have eaten nothing, further reinforcing the need for their body to store fat. Or they have punched in the wrong hormonal code and told the body to release insulin which in turn converts all the excess sugar to fat, so clients aren't hungry any more but have just got bigger.

Typically, most clients need to add more protein and fat to their breakfast to help stabilise insulin. Their breakfast needs to be bigger than their dinner, since clients will use their morning calories walking about and doing stuff during the day but perhaps the same cannot be said for their evening meal. The reason why they can't stomach breakfast in the morning is probably due to the massive meal they gorged on the previous evening.

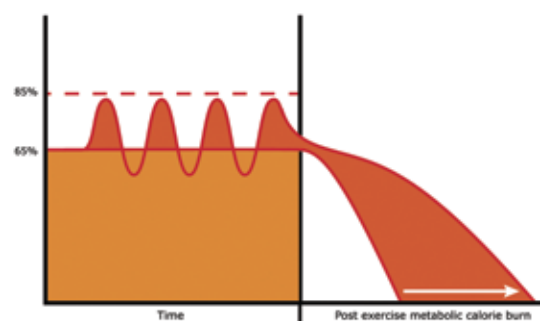
Typically, if you put on 5kg of lean muscle tissue on your clients, you will get them losing fat. Half a kilogram of muscle will burn 50 extra calories in a 24-hour period. So just by putting on 5kg of lean muscle we can drastically alter our clients' and members' BMR and in the process burn an extra 500 calories daily. Over a year this can add up to 15kg of fat loss.

The challenge at the moment is that most people are not doing resistance training hard enough to put on the lean muscle required. Women in particular need to be getting off the cross-trainer and on to the weights floor, and doing heavy compound multidirectional resistance exercises that will work the whole body and significantly alter their heart rate in the process. Women generally have issues around becoming big. If you have a client that says they don't want

to be become big, just tell them that half a kilogram of muscle is kind of like a large strawberry and that half a kilogram of fat is like a block of butter. Then ask how many strawberries they want to swap for butter across their hips, butt and thighs.

Cardiovascular training

People also need to perform a progressive cardio workout, but at a much higher intensity than just sitting in their fat burning zone, which is great if they want to read magazines when they work out, but doesn't actually shift any fat. What they need to do is to raise their metabolism rather than burn fat. This means doing high-intensity interval training, operating at around 85% of their maximum HR for periods, resting, then going again. Intervals on the rower, cross-trainer, or treadmill are all fantastic metabolic enhancers. If we can raise our clients' metabolism, it will stay raised for up to 4-5 hours after their workout. This means that they are burning calories when they are back at the office, while traditional fat burning (low-intensity cardio work) only uses calories during the workout, and their metabolic rate will return to normal soon after.



Psychological issues

Aside from knowing the formula for fat loss, most people's challenges and barriers for fat loss are located in their subconscious mind; the subconscious mind accounts for 99.99% of behaviours. In this way most people don't even realise they are sabotaging their own success. People need to move their thinking from the body shape they currently are, and flood their subconscious mind with the thoughts, images, and perceptions of the body shape that they wish to become. This means taking their mind to the type of thinking that someone who was 10kg lighter would have. This would impact all decisions revolving around exercise and food choices – someone 10kg lighter would make better all-round decisions in their lifestyle. This is the challenge in losing fat: moving your clients' thinking from where they currently are, and helping them focus on where they want to go. This is where the power of coaching on behaviour change comes in.

Summary

Get your clients eating the right foods to balance their insulin, and consuming five meals daily, with three to four hours between meals. With regards to programming, aim to put 5kg of lean muscle tissue on your members and clients by doing multidirectional compound resistance exercises, combined with high-intensity interval training. If they only have time for three workouts per week, get them doing the resistance training first then finish off with the intervals. ^{fn}



Steve Jack has set up PT studios, managed fitness centres and corporate health consultancies, worked with national sporting teams, and presented at industry conventions. For more information on weight loss programmes for clients visit www.newwavetraining.com

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