



Loser, Gainer or Maintainer - which are YOU?

I have very little interest these days in all the media-hyped stories of dramatic, rapid losses of body weight. “Big losers” don’t impress me, for numerous reasons.

For one, weight is not fat. “Weight” could be composed of mostly lean tissue, or it could be mostly water weight. In fact, I would go a step further and point out that rapid loss of bodyweight correlates very highly with a greater chance of relapse, weight re-gain and long term failure.

So what does impress me? What gets my attention?

I pay attention to what the “long term maintainers” have to say - those are the people who have maintained an ideal weight for over a year... preferably even 2-5 years or more.

Don't listen to "losers"... listen to maintainers!

As I was researching the subject of long term weight maintenance recently, I was surprised at the huge amount of research that's already been done in this area.

One paper that caught my interest was published by Judy Kruger and colleagues in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*/ It was titled,

“Dietary and physical activity behaviors among adults successful at weight loss maintenance.”

This was not an experimental study, but a compilation of data from the “Styles Survey” which was representative of the U.S. population and asked respondents questions about strategies to aid with weight maintenance.

In this particular survey, only one-third (30.96%) of the respondents said they were successful at keeping their weight off. The researchers wanted to know the difference between the small group that was successful and the majority that were not.

The difference between losers and maintainers

Both groups reduced the amount of food they consumed, they ate smaller portions, more fruits and vegetables, fewer fatty foods and fewer sweetened beverages.

Not really any surprises there, but what we want to know most is not what losers and maintainers have in common, but what the maintainers did that the losers didn't.



Some major differences emerged between losers and maintainers:

First, a significantly higher proportion of successful maintainers reported exercising 30 minutes or more daily, and they also reported adding other physical activity to their daily schedules (recreation, sports, physical work, etc).

In addition, more of the successful maintainers included weight training in their exercise regimens than did the losers.

Reducing sedentary activities (TV watching, etc) was also a significant difference between those who successfully maintained and those who did not.

The next big difference that separated the successful maintainers from the unsuccessful was in their **“self-monitoring behaviors”** including:

- tracking calories
- tracking body weight
- planning meals
- tracking fat
- measuring the amount of food on their plate



Unfortunately, these types of self-monitoring behaviors, especially weighing and measuring food and counting calories, are among the most avoided and even criticized weight loss techniques.

Some weight loss “experts” even claim that it's detrimental to count calories, weigh yourself or measure and weigh your food.

However, these self monitoring behaviors are being identified more and more often in the research as part of “the difference that makes the difference.”

No Excuses!

A final difference was that people who reported self-perceived “barriers” to their success were 48-76% less likely to be a successful maintainer.

For example, they said they had no time to exercise, they were too tired to exercise or it was too hard to maintain an exercise routine. I interpret this as: the unsuccessful losers were excuse makers!

THE TOP 5 STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL WEIGHT MAINTENANCE

So let's recap and turn these research findings into some practical action steps for you.

1. **Increase your total daily activity level**, including formal exercise as well as sports, physical work or recreational activity. Exercise improves weight loss, but more importantly, it is critical for weight maintenance.
2. **Decrease sedentary recreational activities** by cutting back on TV watching, computer games and web surfing. Take up physical recreation such as sports, boating, biking, walking, hiking, gardening, physical hobbies and playing with your kids, if you have them.
3. **Include weight training** as part of your formal exercise program, throughout the fat loss phase and even more seriously during weight maintenance phase.
4. **Track and monitor everything!** Count calories and nutrients, measure your portion sizes, weigh your food, plan your menus in writing and monitor your body weight and body fat percentage.
5. **Avoid excuses** and maintain positive beliefs and attitudes towards your environment and what you perceive as "barriers." For example, say, "I can always make time for what is most important to me" instead of, "I don't have time to exercise."

Conclusion

If you're currently on a fat loss journey, and you want to know how good your odds are for being a successful maintainer, it's pretty easy to predict using these 5 strategies. If you're not using all 5 of them yet, then when would be a good time to start today?

There are limitations to survey results such as these, including the fact that they are cross sectional, and therefore cannot prove causality. However, I believe these findings are important and significant.

Not only do they confirm previous similar studies and agree with the findings of other groups of successful weight maintainers (such as the National Weight Control Registry),

THIS is the type of advice I'd suggest you listen to the most: advice about how to lose body FAT, not body WEIGHT, and how to maintain an ideal bodyweight and body composition over the long haul, not how to lose weight as fast as possible.



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