



### *Running and Weight Loss*

Last month's article I talked about the importance of setting realistic goals for the New Year. One of the most common activities that people begin during the New Year is running. Often, the plan is to start running, try to eat less and the pounds will melt away. However, runners commonly find that they hit a plateau, when despite their new running lifestyle; they can't seem to lose any more weight.

This month I'll discuss specific workouts and strategies you can use to not only improve your running but help you breakthrough the weight loss plateau. Additionally, I will simplify the weight loss process by focusing on proven guidelines that help you achieve your weight loss and more importantly weight maintenance goals.

First off, let's simplify the discussion about weight loss. It can be extremely confusing and frustrating for runners and exercisers alike who want to lose a few pounds but can't seem to get down to their goal weight.

Today it seems like there is more weight loss information than ever. There is even a prime time television show dedicated to people losing weight! However, with so many people trying to lose weight the market has been saturated with pills, potions, and exercise products making outrageous claims. So what really works?

Despite all the confusion it is important to remember three simple factors that anyone trying to lose weight needs to remember.

- **Physical Activity:** (in this case running)
- **Nutrition:** (expending more calories than you take in)
- **Long term behavioral changes:** (setting realistic goals and establishing healthy habits)

Everything you can do, with the exception of surgery, to lose weight fits into these three categories. The proper use of these three and these three alone can help you achieve your goals. No pills, powders, or extreme diets are needed.

Let's start with physical activity. Believe it or not physical activity is not necessary to *initially* lose weight. If you really watch your diet you can simply cut calories and lose weight. However, it is almost impossible to lose weight and keep it off if you don't do some type of physical activity. Additionally, when you run more you increase the amount of calories you burn and you can actually eat a little bit more. For long term health

benefits and weight maintenance (an often neglected concept) physical activity is a must. This is mostly due to your metabolism slowing down as you get older. Physical activity allows you to keep your diet relatively the same without having to significantly cut calories as you age. If running is built into your lifestyle you can eat more than the non runner and just make tiny adjustments throughout your lifespan.

Secondly, you cannot neglect your nutrition. One of my favorite saying is, “you can’t out train a bad diet.” This means you can put a lot of hard work into your running but if you completely neglect your nutrition your performance and weight loss goals will suffer. The good news is you don’t have to eat like a model and you don’t have to go on any crazy restrictive diets. You simply have to watch portion sizes and create a small caloric deficit. Most nutritionists will recommend a 500 to even 1,000 calorie deficit a day, but if you just started running you may want to start with a smaller deficit (300 calories per day) in order to gradually lose weight and make sure you are eating enough to fuel your workouts. This approach is typically easier because if you pass on desert or cut out one latte a day you can create this caloric deficit. Crazy yo-yo diets or diets that restrict an entire food group can help you lose several pounds in a few weeks, but long term, individuals almost always gain a majority of the weight back. Individuals who use restrictive diets while starting a running program will do more harm than good.

Thirdly, and I often find this to be the hardest one, are long term behavioral changes. Sounds like something from the Dog Whisperer. Long term behavioral modifications are often the x-factor when it comes to weight loss and weight maintenance. I find that individuals focus too much on a specific weight and have unrealistic timelines for their weight loss goal.

Long term behavioral modifications are all about taking a long term approach to your weight loss and running goals. You must work on developing habits you can stick to for the long haul. The great thing is that for a while you can literally have your cake and eat it too. However, as you start to progress in your running you will also start to be more disciplined in your diet because you know how hard you have worked to be that close to your next PR. Running and weight loss can really help complement each other.

Here is how to achieve both your running and weight loss goals:

### **1. Do the Math:**

Running is one of the most efficient activities you can do for total caloric expenditure. However, a typical 30 minute run for a 155lb runner burns between 280 calories (12min per mi pace) to 560 calories (6min per mi pace).

Thus, each runner is different in how many calories they burn. One of the simplest activities you can do to help you understand your own caloric expenditure is to do the following exercise:

- Find a treadmill that you can enter your current weight into
- Run a basic 15-30min run
- Run at your typical easy pace or a pace you know you can sustain for the full 15-30min.
- When you are done record the total number of calories you burned
- Figure out what you would burn in a typical week of running.

This provides a baseline of how many calories you burn on an average week. This number will fluctuate depending on duration, environment, fatigue, intensity and several other factors but you at least have some type of concept of what you are actually burning.

Thus, if you burn 400 calories on an average run you need to account for that when selecting foods.

When you run outside the total calories burned will go up but as long as you're not in extreme heat, wind, or terrain the total number of calories will only deviate a little.

## **2. Log It:**

Most seasoned runners have stacks of daily training logs that help them keep track of training runs, weekly miles, and race results. Your nutrition is no different. However, you don't have to keep a yearly nutrition log. Just record what you eat for three days. This can have a major impact on your running and weight loss goals. It provides you with real life evidence of what you put in your mouth. Make sure you get to know the servings sizes of what you eat and record all of your calories.

The good news, as most nutritionist will tell you, is that no foods are off limits. You just have to be aware of portions sizes and what calories you are actually consuming. This strategy is much more realistic then drastically overhauling your entire diet for a more restrictive one.

After following the first two steps you now have a real life individualized idea of what you use during running and what you eat.

You then have to create a caloric deficient (burning off more calories than you consume) of at least 300 calories.

If you do the math (300 calories a day x 7 days a week x 52 weeks in a year/by 3,500 calories in a pound) over the course of a year you can drop up to 30lbs! The important thing though is that you did it with steady realistic changes that you can actually stick to.

## **3. Minutes not Miles:**

Focusing on minutes and not miles will help keep you healthy. Beginning runners tend to focus too much on their pace when they should just focus on training consistently and getting more total time under their belts. Once you have done four to six weeks if not more, of easy miles, you can then gradually start to incorporate more advanced training that will specifically help your speed and endurance

## **4. Go the Distance:**

Adding a consistent long run to your schedule can do wonders. Once you can run 30 minutes without stopping, add 5-10 minutes to one of your runs until you reach at least 60 minutes. You will have to start off slow, around 65% effort, but the longer duration will make up for the lower intensity. Plus, this is an optimal intensity for burning primarily fat a fuel source.

## **5. Need for Speed:**

At some point you have to start getting out of your comfort zone and start pushing the pace. The tough part is you have to run faster, the good news is you can run the same amount of time but will burn more calories doing it.

There are hundreds of workouts that work on your speed and burn more calories in the process, but one simple workout to start with is 10x30 seconds at 5k pace with a 1-2 minute rest. From this workout you can gradually advance to 3-4 minutes at your 5k pace with up to 3 minute rest. However, if you really want to get after it then you can do the same workouts but run them at a pace that you would for just two miles.

On that note I highly recommend the Big River summer speed work.

<http://www.bigriverrunning.com/speedwork.php>

Cheap plug I know, but it's **FREE** and for runners who started running in January, the summer is a perfect time to take your running to the next level.

## **6. Resistance Train:**

This is often overlooked by runners but just two 30 minutes sessions a week can really help lose fat and gain muscle. This can also help prevent injuries, which allows you to run more and thus burn more calories. Start off with basic, injury prevention, strength exercises and then gradually advance to more complex multi-joint movements.

Taking all of these tips into account an ideal week might look like this.

M – Easy Run or Rest

T – Speed workout

W – Easy Run or Rest

T – Resistance Train

F – Easy Run or Rest

S – Resistance Train

S – Long Run: working up to 60 minutes at 65% effort

So as I like to say, “It’s not rocket science, its exercise science.” In the world of running and weight loss little changes can make a big difference and long term changes can make a world of difference. Stick to the basics and your road to success will be paved with a slimmer waistline and new PR’s.

**Tim Bradley is a certified strength and conditioning specialist, has a masters degree in exercise physiology and is the assistant track and cross country coach at Saint Louis University. In 2008 he began Big River personal coaching services and has helped runners of all ability levels reach their goals with individualized training plans and one-on-one attention. For more info on Tim’s coaching services and to help you achieve your own goals go to [www.bigriverrunning.com/personalcoaching](http://www.bigriverrunning.com/personalcoaching).**

Coach [Tim Bradley](#)

Phone: 314-882-1778

Email: [tim@bigriverrunning.com](mailto:tim@bigriverrunning.com)

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/coachtbradley>