**BREAKING A WEIGHT OR FITNESS PLATEAU**

**Chalene** **Johnson**: Hey there, thanks for the download. This is the podcast devoted to tips, shortcuts, advice from the experts to help you create a crazy, ridiculous, amazing, fun-filled life. And today’s episode is devoted to breaking a plateau.

**Male Speaker**: Welcome to The Chalene Show. Your host has been known to lie about her height and her age.

**Chalene Johnson:** I don’t lie about my age or my height. I’m optimistic about my height. That’s for sure. I was once measured 5’2”. And I’ve been measured under 5’2” before. I will say this, the nurse practitioner who measured me at 5’2” had exceptional attention to detail. I happen to think that she is the best in her field. Yes, I’ve been measured under 5’2” before but I don’t know anything about that nurse’s credentials. She seemed as though she was taking very sloppy notes, so I don’t really even trust that I am under 5’2”. So there is the answer there.

And as it relates to my age, I don’t lie about my age either. I am - well, I’ve made the - I’ve made a mistake about my age before. For a whole year I told people that I was a year older than I actually was because I’m - I messed up and I forgot.

The reason why I do that I guess is because I don’t - it doesn’t really matter. In my head I’m 18 years old. I feel 18 except that I have more experience, more knowledge and more humility than I had at 18, but I’ve got the energy that I had when I was 18. I feel like I relate to young people. So it doesn’t really matter to me what number shows up on my driver’s license. I am young at heart, young in spirit. And that’s all that matters.

Today we’re going to talk about weight loss plateaus. To begin, let’s clarify that there is a difference between a weight loss plateau and difficulty reaching your goal weight once you’ve kind of hit the set point. So in other words, there are some people listening right now who have a hundred pounds to lose. And they’re in the middle of that journey. They’ve lost 50 pounds. And the first 50 pounds came off pretty easily. And now suddenly they’ve hit stalemate. They can no longer lose pounds as quickly or, in fact, you’ve started to creep up a couple of pounds. You went from losing 50 and now you’ve gained 4 or 5 pounds back and you just can’t seem to get back to that place where you were where the weight was coming off very quickly. That’s a plateau.

A plateau can also happen when you don’t have a hundred pounds to lose, you’ve got 20 pounds to lose and you’re steadily losing 2 pounds a week, 2 pounds a week, a pound a week, a pound a week, 2 pounds. And then suddenly, you go several weeks without losing an ounce. That is a plateau.

Now, the difference between that and having trouble moving beyond your set point or reaching your goal weight is typically what most people would describe as vanity pounds. In other words, for whatever reason, you’ve decided you need to be a very specific number. And you may have picked this number because you once looked down at your scale when you were a junior in high school and the scale read this number. Or you picked some famous celebrity who in an interview told the world how much she weighed and you decided that’s the weight that you should be.

And now you’re three or four pounds or five pounds above that. And for years you’ve been trying to get to that number and your body just won’t go there. That my friends is what we call vanity pounds.

Today’s show is all about the plateau. The first thing you need to understand about a plateau is that it’s very natural and it’s in fact expected. It’s part of the journey. Think about what your travels would be like if you jumped in a car right now and drove across the country. You’d have peaks and valleys and flat roads. In other words plateaus. The human body is incredibly adaptive. And you really have to keep that in mind because that’s why it’s so important. That’s why I’m constantly preaching that you’ve got to change things up. Go back and listen to previous episodes that I’ve done about nutrition. Try one of those programs. Think about a different exercise program that you can try or do.

The reason why I’m constantly talking about new methods of training your body and fuelling your body is because that’s how we’re able to avoid adaptation. In other words, our body is forever trying to get into a state of homeostasis to maintain a certain level of equilibrium. Our body wants to figure out, like, okay, is this what we’re doing? So are you saying that we’re only going to get x number of calories? Because if that’s the case, human, then we’ll only burn x number of calories. Your body is always trying to say, okay, if this is what you’re eating and this is what you’re doing for exercise, then we will adapt your metabolism for you.

Unfortunately, we don’t spend a lot of time especially when we’re designing diet plans talking about the dreaded plateau. But when you understand that a plateau is very natural and what to do about it, you can maintain that motivation and excitement that it takes to get to your goal.

All right, so what are your options? Well, the first and the easiest is to do nothing. Typically, a plateau is going to last for about three weeks, anywhere from three to four weeks depending on what research you read. That’s your body’s way of saying, “Are you sure you really want to eat this amount of calories and exercise this much, because we would like to stay right here at this particular weight and we were getting comfortable right here? So that’s where we’re going to stay.”

If you continue to eat in the way that you’ve been eating that has helped you to lose those initial pounds, to lose the body fat, if you continue to exercise in the same manner after a certain period of time, after about three weeks, the plateau should break. In other words, your natural weight loss or reduction in body fat should continue. But don’t forget that the closer you get to your goal weight, the longer the plateaus are and the harder it is to break them.

So if you do nothing and after three or four weeks you’re still not seeing any progress, and remember that there is more than one way to evaluate progress, certainly as you’re getting closer to your goal weight, the scale may not reflect your progress but you might notice, hey, my jeans are actually fitting loser or I can just tell in my face or in certain areas of your body that your body fat is actually reducing. So, that’s an important thing to take note of because you might just be looking at the scale and the scale is only a very small fraction of the whole story.

But let’s just say you’re like, “I can tell. Nothing has changed. My jeans fit the same way. The scale isn’t moving. I’ve taken measurements. My measurements aren’t changing. I have truly hit a plateau. Now what you can do is make some changes. The first thing I’m going to suggest to you is to change your food, nutrition, start there, because that’s where you can make the most dramatic impact on your progress.

What I don’t want you to do is just start consuming less calories. Because, again, our bodies are really, really smart, it’s always trying to adapt. So if you’ve hit a plateau and you’re not eating a lot of calories, and you’re exercising like a maniac and you’ve hit a plateau and you’re like, “Okay, my only option is to exercise more and eat less,” how fun does that sound #notatall? Not at all. Who wants to do that? Who can maintain that? And even if you could, because some people do, they do, and they look sickly and they’re terribly unhappy and they are in a prison, and many of these people often will slip into eating disorders or disordered eating, if nothing else.

So before you decide, “Okay, I’m going eat just - I’m just going to eat less and exercise more,” I would like for you to first play with what we call zigzag nutrition or calorie cycling. What is that? You take that 2,000 calories and you say, “Okay, today, I’m going to have 1,400 calories. And tomorrow, I’m going to have 2,600 calories.” So that over the course of the entire week you’re still having the same number of calories but your body isn’t quite sure what’s going on. It’s like one day you’re kind of eating a lot more calories and then the next day you’re kind of restricting calories or eating fewer calories. And your body is like, what is going on here? It’s very difficult to stick with your set point. This is a wonderful way to break a plateau.

I’ve done it myself. I’ve used it on my clients. And it works really, really well. But remember, nutrition is never one size fits all. So you want to experiment with this stuff. Let’s say you try that and it’s really kind of fun because one day you’re like, “Oh, yay, this is my big calorie day.” And then on the skimpy calorie days, with the days where you have fewer calories, one of the easiest ways to get around that because you’re like, “Oh, no, this is the day where I don’t get to eat as much.” Just wake up a little later and go to bed earlier and you won’t feel like you’re restricting. Just getting that extra sleep, that too is going to help you break your plateau.

But let’s say you do this and basically as you can see over the course of seven days you’ll still be consuming the same amount of calories, you’ll just be zigzagging your calories, up one day, down one day, up one day, down one day. And you can make it more effective by getting more sleep on the days where you’re consuming fewer calories. This is pretty cool. If that doesn’t work for you, try doing zigzagging or the calorie cycling and also creating a little bit more of a deficit. So, in other words, you’ve probably created a certain number of calories that you know has helped you to continue to lose weight. And by doing the calorie cycling, your basically consuming the same amount over the course of the week and now you’re like, well, it has not created a break in my plateau. Try this, take the total number of calories that you would like to consume or you have been consuming over the course of a week, and one day you’ll have 1,400 calories and the next day 2,000. So in other words, one day you’re going at a deficit and then the next day you’re back at that same number that your body has become used to.

In other words, when we’re doing the zigzagging in a more extreme fashion, you can take one day where you’re going even lower but you’re not going lower for days and days and days. When we do that, when we so dramatically restrict our calories, it’s rewarding because we often lose weight pretty quickly. We’re like, “Oh, wow, I broke my plateau” or “I lost weight really fast”.

But then what happens, our bodies are so smart, they begin to adapt and they’re like, “Oh, okay, I get it. We’re only going to be consuming 1,400 calories and you’re still working out a lot, so I guess what we’re going to need to do so that you stay alive is dramatically slow down your metabolism. And that’s how people who are chronic dieters end up in what I call diet prison. It’s like, “I can’t work out any more than I already am. I can’t eat less. I’m so miserably unhappy and I can’t lose weight. Not only that, it’s very difficult to put muscle on in that state because your body is under attack. And when our bodies are under attack, the safest thing for us to store is, you guessed it, body fat. That’s a surefire recipe to be skinny-fat and very unhappy.

My next tip to break a plateau is attention to detail. Oftentimes when people make a commitment to change their bodies and to go on this journey, to start eating healthy and exercising, they’re very meticulous about the rules. And in the beginning, myself included, when I’m trying something new I really pay attention to the details. Okay, when am supposed to eat? How many calories was I supposed to consume? What was the grams of protein I was supposed to have in this meal. And I typically will weigh things and measure things until I get a handle on it. I’m like, “Okay, now I can eyeball it and I’m feeling pretty confident and comfortable that I can maintain this as a lifestyle.

What often happens though is we slowly start to creep in to our old habits. So even though you might be saying, “I’m exercising just as hard. And I’m eating just as clean as when I was losing all of the weight. And I think I’m consuming the same amount of calories.” What I will find when I was working with clients is that they weren’t. They’ve forgotten to include the glass of orange juice that they were drinking every night before they went to bed. That’s a true story. I had a client who was losing weight, losing weight, losing weight and she started in the evenings before she went to bed craving this big glass of sugary orange juice. By this stage we were no longer keeping a food journal because she really had gotten a handle on it, was doing wonderful with her progress. So I said, “All right, it’s time to pay attention to details. I want you to take this journal home and I want you to write down every single piece of food that goes in your mouth and don’t forget to calculate every ounce that you’re drinking whether it’s wine, water or juice.” And sure enough, she came back with the journal and there we found hundreds of extra calories and sugar each and every day that she had not accounted for.

So attention to detail may actually unveil for you hidden calories that you didn’t realize were the culprit in your plateau. How cool would that be if you found out you actually don’t have to consume fewer calories and you don’t have to exercise anymore, you really just need to keep a food journal, keep better track of what you’re consuming and how often you’re exercising to get back to that place where you’re actively moving towards your goal.

The next thing that I want to talk about is changing it up from a fitness perspective. You’ve heard the term cross-training. Now cross-training isn’t just to keep you interested and excited. It’s to keep your body confused. You’ve heard Tony Horton talk about muscle confusion. There is science behind that. When the body knows what you’re going to do every day, it gets really good at adapting and conserving calories.

You see, there’s this primitive side to us. It involves our hormones and our DNA and the way that we consume calories and exercise that our bodies are forever trying to protect us. The same is true of our exercise patterns. A great example of that is when I was doing Turbo which is my form of kickboxing every single day. I mean, I was doing - I was doing Turbo Kick seven days a week, some days twice a day because I was teaching it. And I got to this point where I’m like, “This is crazy how much I’m exercising and my body is not changing,” and I had to start doing other forms of activity.

Well, then we started filming for the infomercial for Turbo Jam. And we brought in all of these experts who hooked us up to electrodes and different mechanisms to very accurately measure our calorie expenditure during the course of an hour. We brought in test participants, people who had never tried the workout, people who were brand new to it, people who had 50 pounds to lose, 75 pounds to lose, super fit athletes, all different levels of fitness, all different levels of weight loss that was needed. And even levels of experience.

And myself and Anna Rita, she was in those original Turbo Jam videos with me. And we use to teach together all the time. So both of us were at the stage where we were probably doing seven or eight hours a week of this one particular type of workout. That meant that I could go harder. I knew it. I could go harder than anybody in that room. Now, for the infomercial, I wanted incredible stats, right? So I said to myself before they hooked us up, I’m like, “I don’t care if I have to crawl out of this room, if I end up puking in front of all these people, I’m going to go as hard as I humanly can. I’m going to go harder than I ever have in my entire life right now because I want incredible statistics and I need - I need good numbers,” right?

So when we finished the doctor was supervising the whole clinical study said to me, “Oh, we’re going to take out the lowest and we’re going to take out the highest scores just so that we get, you know, something more accurate.” And guess who was the lowest? Yup, me, the lowest. And right behind me was Anna Rita. Why? Because our bodies had become so adapted to that workout that it didn’t require much energy to get through it. Our muscles knew exactly how to conserve themselves even when I was pushing myself to the max. This was such an expected workout for every system in my body that my body was no longer burning calories at a maximum rate. And that was an eye-opening day for me.

It took me awhile to really embrace that. I was like, “I don’t believe it. I don’t believe it. This is an incredible workout. That doesn’t make sense. I can barely breathe. This doesn’t even make sense.” And I almost dismissed his findings.

And then I bought a BodyBugg and a Fitbit and every single time I looked at my own results, I found that the things I was doing over and over and over again were not giving me good results. And that’s when I just decided, I have go to change it up. If I’m going to exercise six times a week, I’m going to try to do something different all the time and not create patterns that make it easy for my body to predict what’s coming and how to adapt. Change up your workout routine. If you are a runner and you’re running six or seven times a week and it gave you great results once upon a time and now you find that your body has lost some of your muscle composition or that you’re no longer losing weight or that you can’t consume the same amount of calories without gaining weight, you’ve got to change it up. And the most effective exercise that you can do is one that’s terribly uncomfortable, one you probably don’t like to do and something that’s new. When you do something that’s new, your body has to strain and struggle to adapt and that my friends burns calories and breaks plateaus.

And the last piece that I think is most important to understand when we’re talking about breaking a plateau is that a plateau is meant to protect us. What else do we know the body does to protect us? Store fat. Isn’t that lovely? So when our bodies are under stress, the body tends to store fat. We know this is true because of the research. We can take two control groups who exercise the exact same amount, who eat exactly the same number of calories. And the group who gets more sleep will always lose more weight than the group who gets less sleep. We know that people who are under a great deal of stress tend to lose weight slower, tend to keep weight stored around their middle. Not only does stress affect our body’s ability to lose weight and to lose body fat, but so too does our hormones.

So if you haven’t already, I would suggest, I urge you to make an appointment with your general practitioner and just say, “I need a full blood work. I need an appointment to know what’s going on with me from a hormonal standpoint.” And I should say that before you try any of these things, make sure you check with your physician. I’m not just saying that to cover my butt legally. I’m saying that because there might be more going on, so rather than torture yourself for three or four, six more weeks, make an appointment to see your doctor and see if there is something else going on.

But aside from hormones, let’s just talk about what we do know. We do know that the body stores fat when we’re under stress. So if you’re working out six days a week, seven days a week and you’re eating fewer and fewer calories, what you’re doing is putting your body under a great deal of stress. Your body thinks that it’s in starvation mode and that you are running away from a predator. It’s constantly trying to hang to whatever little amount of nutrition you’re giving yourself and your body is probably not getting adequate rest. You’ve got to change up your workouts, not just so that they’re intense and a different type of intensity every single day, but so that some of your workouts are restorative.

I’m okay with you exercising six days a week. Even seven days a week as long as several of those days are really meant to restore your body, your mind, your soul. Try doing some stretching or Tai Chi or - or swimming but just at a leisurely pace, doing a recumbent bite, not spinning, leaning back, reading a book, letting your legs move, but without beating yourself up. You know, for many years now, that’s kind of the message we’ve been served up in the media. And I’m part of that fitness community, so I’m going to raise my hand and take some personal responsibility here as well. But we have to do a better job of helping people understand that high-intensity workouts are not meant to be done every single day. Your body can’t take that level of stress without breaking down and eventually saying, “Okay, enough is enough, now I’m going to protect you by storing fat” or breaking down and literally having injuries that force you to take weeks, days, months off of your routine.

This last one might be really difficult for you to try, but if you’ve done all these other things and you still can’t break your plateau, take a week off of exercise. What? Take a week off of exercise and completely change your nutrition. Keep the exact same number of calories but flip flop it. So maybe you’re doing a really low-carb diet and high-protein, I want you to consume the same number of calories, take a week off of exercising, get an extra hour of sleep each night and change the way you eat for a week. Go gluten-free. Go vegetarian. Try going a week of super-low carbs. Whatever it is you’re doing right now, think of something that would be really dramatic and try that for a week. And see if it doesn’t help you break your plateau. But I need you to keep fighting. Don’t give up. Don’t let this plateau derail you. Remember that plateaus and distractions, those are signs that you’re closer than you’ve ever been. Don’t let that little slip turn into a slide. You are so close and you want it. And this is part of the journey. This doesn’t mean failure. Gaining a couple of pounds or going several weeks without seeing any progress, all that is meant to do is test you to see how tough you are. And really, it’s your body’s way of saying, “We love you. We want to adapt for you. You sure you want to go further with this.” And you just stick to your resolve. You’re so close. You can do this. But change your perspective.

Don’t beat yourself up because you’ve hit a plateau. Just know that this plateau is a good sign. It’s a healthy sign that you’re closer than you’ve ever been before. I just want to tell you how much I love spending this time with you. It is awesome to do these podcasts and to really connect with people. I love you guys so much and I absolutely love the reviews you’ve been writing for me on iTunes.

I have to read you a couple that just came in today. Dona Fisher said, “Chalene, I’ve totally stopped listening to my radio in the car. My car is completely devoted to Chalene’s podcasts. I love looking forward to your valuable information and I feel like I’m commuting with a friend.” That’s awesome. Thank you so much. And **[Jen Elno 0:23:14]** says, “I’ve started listening to these podcast while driving to and from work and I highly recommend them to anyone and everyone. I would especially love for anyone to listen to this who wants a better life. She’s witty.” Thank you so much. “And knowledgeable and she really does her research to present the material in an exciting, funny and interesting manner that makes you want to listen.” Thank you so much for these. I’m just reading a whole bunch of them. There’s one here - a bunch from - just from today which is awesome. Thank you so much. This information is free. That was from **[Batgirl4 and** **MesselMe 0:23:46]** says, “Her advice is so valuable and she delivers every bit of information in a fun and fresh and energetic way. She is amazing and a genius.” Oh, my goodness, someone just called me a genius. And she’s helped me in so many areas of my life. I love both of her podcast. Those are so awesome. Let’s read one from a dude. **[John F.S. 21 0:24:04]** says, “I love Chalene’s sincerity and her great advice. Thank you for all this great information. You are forever in my ear.” I love it.

So thank you for writing those reviews. I read them every day. I don’t, you know, get a ton every day. So if you ever want to just make sure I see your written words, trust me, I am going to the iTunes store and I love hitting refresh to see who’s done that. Because you can only do it from your desktop computers, so I know it takes a couple of extra steps. It’s really meaningful to me, I guess, because I know it’s not easy. You can’t write a review from your phone. You actually have to go on your desktop. And then you have to go to the iTunes store and you have to log in and, you know, it’s not easy. So when you do that for me, I - it feels like a gift and I love you. So thank you so much, you guys. It means the world to me. And thank you for spending this time with me and sharing my podcast with your friends. You are the bomb dot com.

**Male Speaker:** Thanks for listening lifers. Chalene invites you to download her seven-day diet book at cj-7-day.com.

**Chalene Johnson:** You really are amazing.

**[END OF RECORDING]**