**Weight Cycling**

Weight cycling is the process of losing weight, only to gain it back and repeat the cycle again shortly thereafter. Weight cycling is often called *yo-yo dieting* because the person's weight goes up and down numerous times. The reason this occurs is due to a metabolic response which tends to increase hunger and alter the way the body stores and uses fat.

**Why Long-Term Weight Loss is Challenging**
- Undereating and restriction, common traits of many fad diets, often trigger the body to more efficiently store fat to prevent further weight loss.¹
- Low carbohydrate diets end up in macronutrient imbalances which can lead to increased fat and calorie intake and subsequent weight gain.¹
- Following weight loss the body’s metabolism slows. Weight regain after weight loss results in increased fat tissue growth and more efficient fat storage.²

**Effects of Dieting**
- Repeated attempts at dieting strongly predicts future weight gain. One twin study of over 4,000 participants showed that the more frequent the weight cycling, the higher the BMI later in life.³
- An estimated 80% of dieters who lose 10% or more of their weight will regain that weight within one year.³
- Regaining lost weight is actually more detrimental to health than remaining overweight or obese in the first place.²
- In 1940 researchers studied⁴ the effects of starvation in a study called the Minnesota Starvation Experiment. Study participants experienced a wide range of negative consequences, including, but not limited to:
  
  **Physical**
  - Decreased basal metabolic rate (energy required by body in state of rest)
  - Decreased appetite and sexual interest
  - Increased feelings of cold, dizziness, weakness
  - Increased binge-eating and purging behaviors during refeeding

  **Psychological**
  - Increased depression and anxiety
  - Increased irritability, emotional distress, and hysteria
  - Increased preoccupation with food
  - Social withdrawal and isolation

This study illustrates the detrimental effects of calorie-restricting diets and is noteworthy considering the study participants ate around 1,600 calories per day, more than many fad diets which are popular today.
Effects of Weight Cycling

Constantly losing weight and gaining it back can have significant health implications.

- **Inflammation.** Fat cells increase in number following weight regain after weight loss. Because fat cells contain inflammatory factors, changes to these fat cells leads to increased systemic inflammation.\(^2\)
- **Hormone changes.** Leptin, a hormone which decreases hunger, is stored in fat cells. Studies show that weight cycling alters the amounts of leptin stored in and released from these fat cells, resulting in increased hunger and weight regain.\(^2\)
- **Insulin resistance.** As a result of increased inflammation, the body becomes less receptive to insulin, increasing risk for developing type 2 diabetes.\(^3\)
- **Cardiovascular disease.** Following weight loss, the body overshoots fat storage and along with it blood pressure and heart rate, factors which contribute to cardiovascular disease.\(^3\)
- **Morbidity and mortality.** Though studies report mixed results, in some cases fluctuating weight has been associated with an increase in all-cause mortality.\(^2\)

Break the Cycle: Establish Health Goals

Consider the following when establishing goals:

- Are your goals healthy enough for loved ones to follow?
- Are your goals temporary or sustainable? Anything that’s temporary (goal, diet, behavior) and the results are too so consider ideas that are reasonable and sustainable for the long-term.
- Do your goals take into consideration your personal strengths, values and interests?
- Are your goals important to you (intrinsically motivated) versus others (e.g. parents, partners, friends, etc.)?
- How will your goals impact your overall health—mentally, emotionally, physically, socially, financially, etc.?

Resources

Books

- *Health At Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight* by Linda Bacon
- *Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Anti-Diet Approach* by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch

Podcasts

- *Food Psych* by Christy Harrison
  A show dedicated to helping you make peace with food and break free from diet culture.
- *Body Kindness* by Rebecca Scritchfield
  A show that shines the spotlight on people from all walks of life and their journeys to a better wellbeing in order to change diet culture and improve kindness to our bodies.

References