Ep #12: 5 Reasons You're Not Losing Weight

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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You are listening to the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast, Episode #12 . Are you making any of these nutrition mistakes? Tune in and find out.

Welcome to the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast. If you're balancing career, family, wellness, and some days sanity, you are in the right place. This is where high achieving, busy working moms get the tools they need to eat, move, and think. I'm your host, physician, personal trainer and Certified Life Coach Carrie Holland. Let's do this.

Hey, how are you? What's new, what's good? So, I am taking advantage of the quiet in our house to talk to you. My husband took our boys to Notre Dame, to tour the college campus and also check out the football stadium. Because football begins this weekend.

So, I will be perfectly honest, and my husband will attest, I am not into football. I am most definitely not into college football or NFL, please don't hate me. I went to a woman's college, there was no football team there. And, it's just something I've never really been into.

However, that being said, what I do love about football season is that it gives me three-to-four-hour chunks of time to really put my nose down and get a bunch of work done. So, I will take that as a win. My kids and my husband are getting a head start today, they're checking out the stadium. And, here we are talking. I'm enjoying the quiet, I'm not going to lie.

So, what we're going to talk about today, we have spent quite a bit of time talking about feelings and laying the foundation for how your mind works. And now, I'm going to turn it back around and nerd out about nutrition, because frankly, I really love to talk about nutrition. And what I'm bringing to you today is a top five list of the most common nutrition mistakes that I see.

So, this is coming from my experience coaching women over the years. Just going through my notes, going through the questions, and the problems that often come up when we're talking about weight loss. I'm just going to start from the top and work my way down.

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So, number five would be not eating enough during the day. I did this exercise with a client once, because despite her best efforts, she was actually gaining weight. We went through and basically ironed out everything that she was eating. And I ultimately realized that between the hours of 5am, when she got up for her workouts, until about 5:30pm, when she got home, she was eating on average 600 calories.

Then, when we did the deep dive, we realized that she was totally overdoing it once she got home, because she was coming home hangry. And honestly, when I look at this, this is common for many of the women that I coach. What it commonly boils down to, is two reasons that you're not eating enough during the day.

One, is that you are so busy during the day that you skipped meals. Or two, you're purposely skipping meals or skimping on meals, in order to save calories for later in the day. So, what I would encourage you to do is take a close look at what you're doing. If it is that you're just not making time for lunch, or if you're purposely skimping on lunch only to overeat later in the day, consider the impact of those choices.

If you are overdoing it at dinner and in the evening, because you're hangry from not eating enough during the day, this is data. This is information telling you that what you're doing is not working. And if this is the case for you, it may mean a couple of things.

One, for many of my very busy working moms, it may actually be that you just don't have time to eat. And, there's some truth to that. For some of the physicians that I work with, clinic can be a nightmare. Your morning clinic runs into your lunchtime, and then the afternoon patients are there and it just doesn't happen.

For some of my surgeons, if you have a patient on the table, you can't just walk away to eat your sandwich. It doesn't work that way. For some of my executives, they get pulled into last minute meetings, or they're on a huge project, they're on a huge deadline, there's one emergency call, and then there's no lunch.

So, what it means for those of you who have the time, but you're not making the time, there's some shifts that need to happen. This is where I would argue that you have to prioritize and make some hard choices, so that you can actually eat. And I will be the first to say, that this is not easy.

However, going back to priorities. If your wellness is a priority. If eating a real lunch is a priority, so that you don't come home and eat everything in sight. Then, we need to find a way to make it happen. If it's not a priority for you, you won't. But what I would encourage you to do is consider the outcome in either situation, because you always have a choice. Okay?

Second, it may be that you need to be more intentional about eating more calories during the day, so you don't come home overly hungry and then overdo it in the evening. That may mean getting up a little earlier to ensure that you eat a solid breakfast, or that you pack a lunch that you can eat at your desk or between patients or between meetings. Something that you can get in when you have no opportunity to leave your desk.

But again, it requires some intentionality behind it. So, in either case, this is about planning. It means that you think through your day, and decide ahead of time what you want to do. And, this also means thinking about the obstacles that may come up. What are the obstacles that may prevent you from getting to your food? And then, determining a strategy to overcome it.

And I know this is not easy. But if you remember from episode three, I go into all the details about what you need in order to be successful at any change. And the first on that list, is a plan. So, I cannot overstate enough, this is one place where having a plan most definitely will help you.

I'm also going to flip and talk about intermittent fasting. So, I'm not going to use this as an opportunity to get into the nitty-gritty on intermittent fasting or time restricted eating, because truthfully, that is an entire podcast, in and of itself. But here is what I have seen happen in a number of my clients who have tried intermittent fasting.

What they will do is essentially skip breakfast, depending on their eating window. And what this leads to, is then, the client will eat whatever they want once the eating window opens. But it just doesn't work that way. So, I know that I am totally oversimplifying, but for many people who take on intermittent fasting, it is essentially skipping breakfast. And I realize full well, that there are nuances to this. And the way that many people describe intermittent fasting, is actually time restricted eating.

But again, that's all secondary, because the point here is this: If, by doing any sort of time restricted eating, it leads you to make food decisions that you are not proud of, once your eating window opens, and especially if it leads you to eat more calories than your body needs, then I would argue it may not be the best option here for you.

And I'm not here to rant on intermittent fasting at all, okay, do not get me wrong. But intermittent fasting is not a magic bullet. So, at the end of the day, the total calories that you take in matters. So, if you're skipping breakfast, and then by the time you get to your lunch or eating window, you're eating Sour Patch Kids™, and burgers and fries, that is entirely missing the point.

So, I've mentioned it previously, and I'll mention again here, and I may get some heat on this, but as far as weight loss is concerned, intermittent fasting is not the be-all-end-all. No matter what you read, no matter what influencer, or even what other physicians say, it really is not a magic bullet.

I'm going back to an article that was in the New England Journal of Medicine, as recently as April of 2022, where they compared calorie restriction versus calorie restriction plus intermittent fasting. What that means is, both groups were given the same amount of calories to eat. And it was a calorie restriction, it was 1400 calories, I believe. Both groups have the same number of calories, one ate them throughout the day, just as they would normally. And then the other group, did it in an intermittent fasting pattern.

And what they found, was no statistically significant difference in the weight loss. So, while it was just one study, it shows that we do not have enough evidence to state that intermittent fasting is the way to lose weight, okay. And I say this because there are some people that are so tripped up on this, and so convinced that they have to eat in a window, I don't know that that's the best way to go about it.

So, here is my take home: If trying to adhere to time restricted eating leads you to making poor food choices, then it may not be the best way of eating for you. Okay. All of this to say, is that if you're saving your calories for later in the day, whether it's by intermittent fasting or simply skimping on your meals, and it leads you to poor food choices that ultimately results in a calorie surplus, you've got your answer. All right.

Number four would be alcohol and other liquid calories. So, I say this all the time, and I see this all the time. If you think you're spot on with your food, but you are still not losing weight, take a look at your liquid calories.

Okay, so I'm going to start with alcohol. Alcohol has seven calories per gram, which is more than carbs and protein. And I'll get to more on that in just a minute. So, let's say you are a wine drinker, the average calories and a five-ounce glass of wine is about 120.

If you do that five nights a week, you've got 600 extra. All right, so say you have a couple on the weekends, it all adds up. Mixed drinks can range from 120 calories for your four-ounce Bloody Mary, up to over 500 for your fancy piña colada. Most hard liquor, most shots, will put you at about 100 calories each. And then beer, all over the map, depending on the alcohol content. But the higher the alcohol content, the more calories you're looking at.

So, even if you're having a salad for dinner, the fancy craft IPA that you have alongside it, may be adding a boatload of calories. And the same is true for coffee drinks. So, I will be the first to say I am not a coffee drinker, but I have been to my share of Starbucks®, and many of those drinks are the calorie equivalent of a burger and fries.

And even the stuff that you're dumping into your coffee; the creamers, the sweeteners, the whipped cream, all those things, it all adds up. Let me make it clear, I'm not saying don't have these things. I'm not saying, skip your glass of wine. And I'm not saying, forego your Starbucks run.

However, if you're not losing weight, and you're spot on with your food, take a closer look at your liquid calories. So, this is true also, for juice, soda, sports drinks, all of it. Really, all you need is water. That's it.

And then number three, would be overdoing healthy fats. So, to be clear, when I'm talking about fats, I mean dairy and fatty proteins like, steak and salmon, olive oil, avocado, nuts, and nut butters. Those are all healthy fats. I'm going to boil it down to these two; nuts and nut butters, because honestly, most people don't overdo it on the salmon.

It is easy, however, to overdo it with things like avocado, nuts, and peanut butter. And specifically, let's talk about those last two. All right, so I will be the first to say, right here right now, I love peanut butter. I will eat it in any way, shape, or form. I do not need bread; I don't need a spoon; my finger serves as a just fine vessel.

However, I know that peanut butter is fat. And, the same is true for nuts. Where many of my clients run into problems, is using healthy fats as a primary source of protein. And that unfortunately, just does not bode well for staying in a calorie deficit. So, I'm going to turn it around and get a little nerdy here about macronutrients.

Of the macronutrients, we've got protein, carbohydrates, and fats. Protein and carbohydrates both pack four calories per gram. Fats, have nine calories per gram. So, going back to math here, because you knew I was going to, fats are the most calorie dense of the macros. Meaning, there are more calories smashed into each unit of fat, compared to the amount of calories smashed into each unit of carbs, or protein.

What I do is, I look at the nutrition label, and I look at which of the macros makes up the majority of whatever food I'm eating. If you've never done this

before, try it out. Try it out for peanut butter, because it's made up, if you look at the nutrition label, it is made up of mostly fat, so I consider it a fat, not a protein. And this is where it commonly shows up in my clients' struggles.

I'll be talking with her about snacks, because that's often where people get stuck. And I'll ask; what kind of snacks are you having? And then, these are two common answers: trail mix, and peanut butter. Now, I love both of these, but I'm going to be very honest here.

Depending on what you're buying, or what you're making at home, trail mix truthfully, is most often glorified candy. And I know this because I'm the one that goes in and pulls out the chocolate chips and the Reese's Pieces™, and then it's just nuts and fruit. And my husband gets mad, and truthfully, so do my kids. So, these are just not optimal sources of protein. And it is so easy to overdo it and go overboard.

So, try this out; go to your pantry, pull out your bag of trail mix and see what a serving size is. Then, go and measure out the serving size; it will be enlightening. And the thing is, is that it is calorie dense. So, what it means is that you're getting a lot of calories, for not a lot of trail mix. And where we run into trouble is, when you are especially hungry, one teeny, weeny serving of trail mix generally does not cut it, and it is really easy to take in more than you intended.

My point here is, that these are just not ideal sources of protein. And it is really tasty, depending on your choice of trail mix, or peanut butter. And it's really easy to overdo it and go overboard on the healthy fats. Don't get me wrong, they most definitely have a place in your diet, but they should not be your primary source of protein.

Again, I said it before, you absolutely need fat in your diet, it helps absorb certain vitamins, it keeps you full, it keeps your cells healthy, it helps to build hormones, it insulates your organs. However, I will say it again, fat should not be your primary source of protein. There's a huge difference.

Okay, so speaking of protein, this is number two: Another place where people get really tripped up, is not considering protein when planning for your meals. So, I really love to talk about protein, and what I will say is this: Similar to most areas of science, there is a very wide variety of opinions about how much protein you really need.

I totally get that. I've scoured the journals, I've looked at the evidence, I've gone to social media, and there are lots of opinions, and of course, none of them agree. So, there are some physicians and scientists that argue we focus way too much on protein and not enough on fiber. And, that most Americans get way more protein than we need. And again, I am not here to argue about this.

But I am here to simply say, that the science is changing. It is dynamic, and based on the science I have read ,here is why I think protein is so important. Science repeatedly tells us that protein is the most filling of the three macronutrients, and it does a whole lot more than that.

Protein serves to regulate your hunger hormones. It reduces the hormone that tells you you're hungry, and it increases the hormone that tells you your full. So, I consider that a win-win. It also has the highest TEF. So, I'm going to get a little even more nerdy here.

TEF is the thermogenic effect of food, meaning, how much energy does it take to digest. So, protein is the highest and fat is the lowest. So, to simplify it even more, you need calories to digest your calories. And of the macronutrients, protein requires the most calories to digest. Protein also helps to rebuild your muscles after strength training. You knew I was going to find a reason to plug in strength training here.

Okay, here it is: It also helps to maintain muscle when you lose weight. So, if you remember from previous episodes, I talked about when you lose weight, you don't get to control the proportion of the weight that comes from muscle versus fat. The majority of weight loss will come from fat, but you will also, inevitably, lose muscle. You can decrease the impact of this, you

can decrease the impact of how much muscle you lose, by increasing your protein intake.

Literature also suggests that protein reduces your cravings, and later day snacking. Literature backs this up, it's good stuff. And it also shows that increasing your protein may not only help to lose the weight, but also to keep it off.

So, when I talk with clients about this, I generally recommend 20-30% of daily calories from protein. And again, science is all over the map about this, we can certainly argue about this, but I'm just presenting to you what I do, and what I have found success with.

If you are wholly plant based, I aim for the lower range of protein. If you eat meat, I will aim for a higher range. And there are tons of shades of grey in between, here. But suffice it to say, the idea that I want to introduce here, is to start centering your meals around protein; for all of your meals and your snacks.

Because what I will commonly see is this: I will talk with the client about what a typical day-in-the-life of eating, looks like for her. And it is not uncommon that it looks something like, a toast or a bagel for breakfast and a salad for lunch. And then, when we get into what's in the salad, it's loaded with veggies.

Then, I'll ask; where's your protein at? And, there is none. Or, she will say, "I put cheese on my salad." And then, when we go back to the toast, she'll say that she puts peanut butter on her toast. And again, both of those; cheese and peanut butter, those are fats.

And then, when we get to snacks, it may be that it's a bag of pretzels. Okay, so here's the thing, it is really, really easy for most of us to get our carbs and fat in. It takes a lot more work and a lot more planning to ensure that you are getting adequate protein at your meals and snacks.

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So, I use this analogy often. Okay, imagine a piece of chocolate cake versus a plate of canned tuna. So, one is most definitely a lot tastier, a lot prettier, and a lot sexier than any other. Alright, straight up. One is a lot easier to consume than the other. And while both have a place in your diet, one is going to get you closer to your goals.

Okay, so hear me now, this is not to say; don't eat the chocolate cake. But I think you can see where I'm going here. My point is, is that it's really easy to get in carbs and fat, it requires a little more intention to get in protein. Here is another reason to think about protein. When your meals and snacks are primarily carbs, and especially processed carbs, there is an impact on your blood sugar.

So, say you're hungry, and you pound a bag of pretzels for a snack, your blood sugar then spikes, and then tanks. And when this crash happens, you will find yourself hungry and reaching for more carbs. So, take that same bag of pretzels and have it with a cup of Greek yogurt, or a half cup of cottage cheese. Now, you've added some protein and a little fat to it.

And what this does, is it causes a slow and gradual rise in your blood sugar minus the crash. So, this is why a snack or a meal of straight-up carbs, like your bowl full of straight-up pasta for dinner, is going to leave you hungry. So again, the point here is, to center your meals around protein first. And, this means snacks, too.

Alright, so last but not least, we got to number one. Most common mistake that I see, is under estimating how much you're eating. So, I save this for last because we have some unpacking to do here. And let me be the first to say, I'm not calling you a liar. Okay, I want to make that very clear.

But what I am saying is that, as humans, myself included, we are pretty terrible at estimating how many calories we're actually eating. And there's most definitely literature to back this up, too. Anywhere, on the order of 600 to over 3,000 calories of underestimation, depending on the research article you're looking at here.

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I say this from a place of tough love, but when someone tells me; but I don't eat that much, and they're not losing weight, I have to wonder what is going on here. Because barring any medical issues, if you eat in a consistent calorie deficit, and the operative word here is consistent, you should lose weight.

So, as a reminder about calories, go back to Episode 6, we get into all the details about the math, and the complexities, and about how all of this works. But suffice it to say, I do not know a single person who lost weight by eating more calories than he or she needed. It just doesn't work that way; thermodynamics does not work that way.

I would argue, that if you're not losing weight, you are taking in more calories than your body needs. So, one of the things I will see, is that a client is using some sort of tracking app or My Fitness Pal® to track her calories. And she will swear up and down that she is coming right in at targets, but she is not losing weight.

Before we go any further, let me just say, this is not to say you need to start tracking your food. Here's where it gets hard. Tracking is an imperfect science, at best. Our ability to estimate portions is pretty poor. So, if you think that you are eating two tablespoons of peanut butter, and that's what you put in the tracker, but you actually ate more like four tablespoons, speaking from experience here, the tracker is going to tell you one thing. But what happened in real life, is another.

The other thing, when you eat out, or if you eat from a recipe that you cook, it often makes it very challenging to know exactly what you are eating, and tracking that can get complicated. And then, if you're just not putting everything in the tracker, then it may look like you're not eating that much.

So again, this is not to say that you need to start tracking your food. But I wanted to outline some of the challenges from using a tracker as a source of truth. Okay. So instead, I would simply ask you to pay attention. Meaning, that extra handful of cheese that you eat, before putting the bag back in the fridge.

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Or, those handfuls of french fries from your kid’s plate that you eat, before you toss the rest in the trash. Or, that half of a cupcake that you eat in the break room; all of these things add up. And if you do these repeatedly, it will likely put you in either maintenance calories or surplus calories.

Just because you don't eat it at a meal or off a plate, those calories still count. But sometimes it happens so fast that you're not even realizing it. So, one of the exercises that I will suggest to a client is to simply write it down. Meaning, we're going old school here. Use a piece of paper and a pen, and just write down every single thing you eat in a day.

And very few people take me up on it, and I get it. But I would argue this, and I've said it before, we can't change what we don't measure. So, if you have never tried this, I do think it's a great exercise. Simply write down everything you eat and drink in a day. You don't even have to put an amount, you don't have to nickel and dime yourself, you don't have to drive yourself crazy, just get an idea of what you're doing.

And it can be quite enlightening, just like the peanut butter. And then, you have data. And the idea is not to beat yourself up here, but instead to get really clear on what is actually going in your mouth. Again, it does not have to be at a meal, to count. It doesn't have to be from a plate, to count. So, simply just writing down what you eat in a day.

Also, have literature to back this up here, can help you lose weight. It is the act of writing and reading, and being mindful, and the act of writing it down, that raises your awareness. And you know, I am all about raising awareness here. So, here it is. These are the top five things I see most commonly, when clients get tripped up in their weight loss.

There are certainly many more. But again, these are the ones that came up most frequently. So, think back to yourself and ask if any of these apply to you? Do you either intentionally or unintentionally save your calories for the end of the day, only to overdo it? Do you drink more calories than you realize? Do you overdo it on your healthy fats? Do you consider protein at

all of your meals and snacks? And, are you under estimating how much you're actually eating? Do any of these apply to you?

So, the point of me asking these questions, is not for you to go and beat yourself up about this. So, the idea here is to get really honest with yourself, and then decide and look at where you may be able to make just a small change in your nutrition, to produce a different outcome for yourself.

Let me reiterate: Whatever change you choose to make, should be done from a place of kindness. So, don't swear off peanut butter for the rest of your life, which frankly, would be impossible for me. And don't give up your pumpkin spice whatever's, that is not at all the idea here.

Instead, I'm asking you to pay attention, be mindful, and be honest. When you do those three things, you are on your way to making positive sustainable change for yourself. That's what this is about. This is what I'm about.

Alright, so let me know what you think about this. I hope you find this helpful. And, that it gives you some ideas to think about for your own nutrition. And certainly, if you have questions about any of these, please find me on social media. I'm CarrieHollandMD, all one word, on both Instagram® and Facebook®.

And you will find regular posts from me about eating, moving, and thinking. Those are my three of my favorite things. And you can also send me a message, I'll get back to you. Many episodes topics have come from your suggestions, so please keep them coming.

Alright, thanks again for hanging out with me. I'll catch you again next week.

To celebrate the launch of the show, I'm going to be giving away a Wellness Journal to five listeners who follow, rate, and review the show. You do not have to give it five stars, although I certainly hope you love what

you've heard so far. But more than anything, please give me your honest opinion and feedback so I can create an awesome show for you.

I would love it if you shared your questions and thoughts, so I can make the show a useful and fun resource for you. Visit CarrieHollandMD.com/podcastlaunch to learn more about the contest and how to enter. I'll be announcing winners on the show in an upcoming episode. See you next week.

Thanks for listening to *Strong as a Working Mom*. If you want more information on how to eat, move, and think so you can live in the body you want with the mind match, visit me at CarrieHollandMD.com.