

Ep #51: How to Create Consistency for Weight Loss



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Carrie Holland, MD, CPT

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You are listening to the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast, Episode #51. If you know what you need to do, but you're not sticking with it, let me help you with your consistency.

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, what's good here? Well, there's actually a number of things. We just finished out the school year. So, that means our kids are in summer mode. And it also means that it's a little more relaxed around our house, and I will take it. What else is good, is I realized last week that I hit 50 episodes on this podcast. To be honest, it was my son who pointed it out to me.

He saw it on my work calendar, and saw that Episode 50 was up. He commented, with a tone of surprise, that I had done that many episodes. Yes, I reassured him. Yes, I did. And while it's been a lot of work, creating this podcast and showing up every week to talk with you, it has also been a whole lot of fun. And I'm so glad that I finally got out of my own way to show up and bring the show to you.

So, I really appreciate you listening, reaching out, offering suggestions, and sharing the show with your friends. And now, it's on to the next 50. So, beyond that, the other thing that's good here, is that we are going to talk about consistency today. The suggestion for this topic actually came from one of you, who wrote in and said, "I know what to do and how to do it. Eating well, planning meals, Working out. But I just can't keep it together and keep going."

When I read her message, I thought about her comments, and then I thought about the people I coach. And it's a recurring theme. So, consistency, while it can be hard to establish at the outset, is essential for success in any lifestyle change, especially when it comes to losing weight.

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I'm making some assumptions here, but most people know what they need to do in order to lose weight or get fit. Most people know that in order to lose weight, it will require a change in the way you eat. And that commonly takes shape in the form of less processed food, less meals from restaurants or takeout, decreasing your portion size, and eating more whole foods like fruit and veggies. And those are just some of the changes. And none of those changes are wild.

I say it all the time, because I truly believe it. But losing weight, in and of itself, does not have to be nor should it be complicated. And while it sounds simple, when push comes to shove, it's just not that easy. It's just not that easy to revamp your diet and stick with it. And while you may want to change your weight so very badly, and you want to be in a body that allows you to move and feel the way you want to feel, it can be really, really difficult to stick with the changes you've set out to make.

It comes down to consistency. So, remember one of the key foundational principles I shared with you at the very beginning of this podcast. In order to achieve change, whether that's related to weight loss, exercise, a career change, starting a business, improving a relationship, whatever it is, there are three essential elements you need to succeed: A plan, consistency, and patience; PCP.

Again, it's simple, but it's not easy. And if you need a review on this, go back to Episode 3 where I go over this. But for today, I'm honing in on consistency because that seems to be where so many of you get tripped up. So, let's dive into this. You know, I'm all about habit, and successful change requires being consistent with your habits, which is easier said than done.

So, here's what we're going to talk about today. We're going to cover what it means to be consistent. Because I find even determining that can be a challenge. So, we're all going to get on the same page from the get-go. Okay?

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Then we're going to talk about why it's so hard to be consistent. And it's important to understand this, so you can leverage your own self-awareness to overcome inconsistency. And then last, we're going to talk about what to do to be more consistent. Meaning, how do you get more consistent at the things you want to do? All right? Let's go.

So, first, what exactly is consistency? I went back to the dictionary on this one, and here's what I found. Consistency means, marked by harmony, regularity, or steady continuity. It also said, free from variation or contradiction.

Okay, so it's been a minute since I've had a math equation on the podcast. And you know I'm a huge math nerd, and I like simple. So, let me give this to you in the simplest way I can think of. Consistency = Practice + Repetition + Frequency. Practice, Repetition and Frequency.

By practice, I mean, you do the same thing. You do a certain behavior. So, think about it. How do you get good at anything? Now, if you were to ask my boys, they would say it without hesitation, "Practice makes progress." There'll probably be an eye roll too, but I'll take it, and I will secretly high-five myself because it means they're listening.

But practice means you do the thing. You have to perform the behavior in order for it to have an effect, right? So, just thinking about it, that does not count. Meaning, if you've identified that part of your weight loss plan will mean stopping your nightly spoonful of peanut butter habit; speaking from experience here; you practice not having the peanut butter.

Or if you're someone who's used to getting takeout for lunch every day at work, but you know that's not helping with your weight loss efforts, you practice bringing and eating the lunch you brought from home. You do the behavior. So, I think of practice as execution; you execute the behavior, and then you repeat it.

I say it all the time, but this is putting in your reps. In order to be successful at changing your habits, you have to execute the behavior repeatedly. You

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do it over and over again. And here's why this matters. When you're changing your habits, you're rewiring neural circuits in your brain. When you repeat a behavior, you're reinforcing that new circuit. And the more you do it, the more reinforcement you got.

So, in the example of skipping takeout for lunch, every time you eat the salad you brought from home, instead of getting burgers and fries from down the street, you are reinforcing the pathway in your brain that says, "Hey, I'm a brown-bagger. I am someone who brings my lunch to work and eats it."

Do you see that? Every time you repeat a habit it reinforces a pathway, and tells your brain 'this is how it is; this is what I do'. And over time, it becomes automatic. And honestly, it gets easier. When you do it regularly, especially if the behavior is challenging, the easier it gets.

Another example of this is getting up early to exercise. So, think about it. The more often you repeat that behavior and get yourself out of bed at 5am, the easier it gets. Contrast that to getting up at 5am on Monday, but then sleeping in Tuesday through Thursday, and then trying to slip yourself out of bed at 5am that Friday. It will be a lot easier to get yourself up out of that on Friday at five, if you've repeated the behavior for the previous four days. You get used to it. Your brain and your body acclimate. Alright?

And then there's frequency. So, this is different from repetition, in that frequency implies that a habit is repeated over a certain period of time. So, that means skipping your nightly pantry raid for candy 28 of the last 30 days. It means eating a salad instead of fries with your dinner, six out of seven days per week. It means doing pull ups at least once a week, every week, in order to be able to keep doing pull ups.

So, frequency is the rate at which something occurs. When you increase the frequency of the behavior, you'll see a larger impact and the habit will get easier to do. Think of strength training, the more you show up and lift the weights, the more muscle you will build, to a point of course. When you lift weights four days a week, every week, for 12 months, you will see a

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very different physique than if you went four days a week one week, no days the following week, one day the next week, and so on, and so on.

To review, consistency means you execute the behavior. You repeat it, often. And you do those repetitions within a time span so that it becomes automatic, so that your behavior goes on autopilot. When you've got those three elements; practice, repetition, and frequency, you are on your way to consistency. All right?

Now that we're on the same page with what consistency is, let's talk about why it's so hard to do. So, first and foremost, let me make it clear that it's in your brain's hard wiring to make changing your habits, and being consistent with them, difficult. Remember, your brain's motivational triad. The goals of your brain are to seek pleasure, avoid pain, and put out the least amount of energy possible.

So, take that and translate it to weight loss. Imagine you're trying really hard to stop boredom eating after dinner. Maybe you're a nighttime reader and your habit is to flip on the TV, head to the kitchen, and grab a handful or maybe multiple handfuls of chips while you watch a Netflix series. When you've done that enough times, it's habit. And habits are your brain's way of saving energy. Habits are your brain's path of least resistance.

Now, imagine you're trying to change that habit, and you've decided that you're not going to eat out of boredom anymore. And then, imagine what happens when seven o'clock rolls around. Dinner's over, and now you're left with a decision. You can do what you always do, and turn on the TV, grab some chips and zone out while you eat them. From a brain efficiency standpoint, there it is.

If that's your habit, that right there is the path of least resistance, and you will most definitely be fulfilling your brain's motivational triad. You got pleasure from the chips; you avoided pain, in the form of boredom, by buffering that boredom with chips and Netflix. And you use very little brain energy to execute that plan because that's what you're used to doing.

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Do you see how that works? That's a habit right there. It's your brain's way of making things easy for you. And your brain doesn't care if those habits are good for you or bad for you, in the long run. All your brain sees is pleasure and avoiding excessive work. And before you know it, you're downing chips in front of the TV.

Now, let's go through what happens when you try to change that up. You've decided that you're no longer going to graze at night in front of the TV. So, when seven o'clock comes and your brain starts saying, "Hey, where's my chips? You have something to deal with." When you choose not to have the chips, you are skipping out on what your brain sees as pleasure, and you're causing a stress to your brain's system.

When you execute a behavior that is contrary to a well-ingrained habit, that takes energy. In fact, it can take a lot of mental energy from you to manage the urge and not grab the chips. So, simply by not having the chips, we have flipped everything your brain wants on its head. We're skipping out on the instant gratification and pleasure of the chips. We're causing pain by not giving your brain what it thinks it wants.

And then, we're using all kinds of mental energy to sit through the urge of wanting the chips without answering it. Do you see that? This is a key reason why being consistent with your habit change is so hard. It's throwing a huge wrench in your brain's well-oiled system; this is biology here.

I share all of this to say, you are normal if you struggle to be consistent in changing your habits, okay? It means you have a normal human brain. When you feel resistance to a new habit, recognize that it's your brain doing its job trying to protect you. It just wants to go back to seeking pleasure, avoiding pain, and putting out as little energy as possible. Okay? So, there's absolutely nothing wrong with you if you have trouble being consistent, it means you're human.

Another reason it's so hard to stay consistent, is that often you get so wrapped up in the result, or the outcome that you're trying to achieve, that you forget about the process it takes to get you that result. So, this goes

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back to results versus habits. I made an entire podcast about result goals versus habit goals, because it is just that important. You can go back to Episode 43, if you want to know more about that.

But for the quick and dirty version here, you can think of it this way. Your result goal is something like, "I want to lose 10 pounds." There's your outcome. But in order to achieve that outcome, you have to put some new habits into practice. And then, you have to be consistent with them. Things like, eating half your plate in vegetables at dinner most nights or trading your usual midday snack of pretzels and soda for Greek yogurt and water.

I get it, those habits, not exciting, not sexy, at all. It is much more compelling to think about 10 pounds down, than it is to think about having broccoli instead of French fries tonight. It is much more fun to think about the outfits you'll wear when you're 10 pounds down, than it is to eat another container of Greek yogurt and skip the vending machine.

It's really easy to get distracted by the result of weight loss. And in the process, you lose precision and consistency in the habits that will get you to that weight loss in the first place. There is a big difference between the goals you have and the habits you need to get you to those goals. So, for most people, your goals are not your habits. Your goal is not broccoli instead of French fries. Your goal is 10 pounds down on the scale, right?

But my own personal mission is to help you see that habits can and should be your goals, because that's where the money's at. And that's why when you coach with me, I will encourage you to set habit goals alongside your result goals.

I want to share something that I read from Seth Godin that really hammered this point home for me. And he said it so very well. I want to quote him here, because I read it and it stopped me in my tracks. He said, "Your audacious life goals are fabulous. But it's possible that those goals are designed to distract you from the thing that's really frightening you. The shift in daily habits that would mean a reinvention of how you see yourself." I love that.

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What I took from this, is the keyword “distraction”. Often, you lack consistency because you get distracted by the big goal; weight loss, a dress size, finishing the race. Whatever it is, you let the result or the fact that you don't have the result yet, you let that distract you from the habits you need to practice in order to get to that result.

So, please don't get me wrong here, it's important to have the goal. If your goal is to lose 10 or 20 pounds, I'm not trying to talk you out of it. The goal is important because it gives you direction. Your goal is to lose 10 pounds, that's your “what”. And what I'm suggesting is that once you've decided on that big goal, and you've decided that you want to lose 10 pounds, the next thing I would encourage you to do is determine how you're going to do it.

Those are your habits. Ten pounds down; that's your “what”. Eating less processed food, more salad, and decreasing your portion sizes; that's your “how”. And if you want to be successful at changing your habits and being consistent, I would argue that you need both, with an extra focus on the how, okay?

Another reason it's hard to be consistent, is that often you confuse consistency with all or nothing. You either do the habit all the time, or you totally blew it. And you don't give yourself any room for failure. So, let me shout it from the rooftops, consistency is not the same as perfection. Okay? It is not the same thing. Do not let your need to be perfect get in the way of you being consistent. This is not a zero-sum game here.

When it comes to your habits, this is not all or nothing. And here's what I mean by this. Say you've got a plan for dinner. You decided that you're having salad and turkey burgers because that's what you planned out, and you're able to pull it together quickly when you get home from work. But then you get stuck at work, and you get home much later than you expected.

By the time you get home, you're so hangry and so tired, you devour a pizza instead. So, here's why this matters. If you take an all-or-nothing view here, you might tell yourself that you blew it and totally lost all of your

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progress, and this is never going to work, and you'll never be able to lose weight, and why not just throwing the towel, and on and on.

But let me remind you, that one decision or one “bad” meal does not undo your progress. You have not undone all the work you did up until that point by having pizza for dinner, okay? Consistency does not mean perfection. You are human. You are going to mess up, we all do it. Okay?

If you take an all or nothing approach, you let that pizza you had for dinner, mean all kinds of negative things about you. You let that one decision mean you've ruined all of your progress, and that reaching your goal is impossible. And then, you use that as a reason to go off the chain and go back to eating whatever you want. And you stop eating your salads, and you go back to eating chips in front of the TV, and it becomes a total downward spiral.

No, that's not what we're talking about here. Instead, how about you keep going? Remember, you're not starting over. You're picking up where you left off; nothing more, nothing less. Do not make it any deeper than that. Okay? It's pizza. Instead of beating yourself up for that one decision, you recognize, “Hey, that was one meal, it's done. And the next meal I have will be different. Moving on.” That's it.

When you let go of the all-or-nothing approach, and recognize that there will be mess ups along the way, and all hope is not lost when they happen, then you can keep your eyes forward and keep rolling. Practicing your habits and practicing consistency. All right?

And the last reason I have found it so hard to be consistent with our habits, is that often you take on too much, too fast, too soon. And it just doesn't work out. So, again, going back to your brain here, your brain just does not like change. Your brain likes the status quo. So, when you go and shake that up entirely, you are creating a struggle for yourself.

But this can get tricky, because the other thing your brain does is trick you into thinking that your motivation will always be there for you. And that

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motivation will help you keep all of these changes afloat. So, think about it. When you've got a goal like losing weight and when you're just getting started, your motivation is at its highest. And when your motivation is high, you get all kinds of ideas about what you can do.

You may tell yourself, "I can eat nothing but fruit and veggies. I can give up all carbs. I can drink nothing but water, and give up my one Coke per day habit. I can stop eating chips before bed. I can do all those things, no problem." But as humans, we do a pretty stinky job of estimating our capacity for change. We tend to overestimate our abilities. We also tend to overestimate our motivation.

And this usually manifests as trying to do way more than we're capable of doing all at once. And when you set those very high, unrealistic expectations of yourself, your brain will just not stay on board with all the changes you're imposing. And when your motivation fades, as it most definitely will, you'll find that it's really hard to keep up with your habits, especially if they are multiple, big, drastic changes. And you'll start to slide. You'll stop following your plan.

When you combine that with an all-or-nothing approach, you may find yourself quitting your habits altogether. So, while at first glance, it may sound appealing to take on a number of large, big changes all at one time. This generally does not lend itself to consistency. In fact, it usually runs directly counter to consistency, because those changes are too hard to keep up. All right?

To review, we just went over why it's so hard to be consistent. At the core of it, your brain does not like change. Remember, your brain likes to seek pleasure, avoid pain, and spend the least amount of energy possible. When you're establishing a new habit, you're basically doing the opposite of all three, and your brain has a hard time with it. But recognize that's normal.

Next, you get caught up in the goal, or the "what", as in 10 pounds down, and lose sight of the habits that will get you there. The habits, that's your "how". But they often are not as exciting as a result itself. Next, you take an

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all-or-nothing approach and let one or two stumbles derail your progress entirely. And last, you take on too much, too fast, too soon. And once motivation fades out, you find that the habits are too hard to keep up.

All right, so now that we've gone over the reasons being consistent is so hard. What do you do about it? At the risk of oversimplifying, which I tend to do here, you be onto yourself. Meaning, you pay attention to your brain. You keep showing up and keep doing the habits while letting the result speak for itself. You keep taking small steps forward and do not get derailed by the missteps along the way. And you may need some accountability.

So, essentially, you do the opposite of all the reasons you're not being consistent. All right? But let's talk through these one by one. First, in order to get more consistent, you have to be onto yourself. And I know I say that all the time and I want to clarify what that means. I don't think of being onto yourself as a negative thing. In fact, I think of being onto yourself as a very positive quality, because that means you're being aware.

In the context of consistency, it means you're paying attention to yourself and recognizing when you're trying to talk yourself out of doing what it was you said you're going to do. It means that you eat the salad and chicken you brought for lunch, even though the rest of your coworkers are ordering Thai food. It means stopping the bargaining in your head that happens when your alarm goes off at 5am. And you get out of bed, like you said you were going to, and you go do your workout.

Being onto yourself means that you recognize when your brain tries to offer you all kinds of reasons to not be consistent. And then, you go into it anyway. Pay attention to your brain. Pay attention to the sentences and justifications that your brain comes up with. Things like, "You earned it. It's Thai food, have it. Your coworkers will think you're weird, if you don't join them. You can eat your salad and chicken tomorrow. Plus, it's already packed for you." That's one that comes up very often.

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But see it for what it is. These are all thoughts your brain is serving up to you in order to fulfill its triad; seek pleasure, avoid pain, exert as little energy as possible. But when you're on to yourself, you can call it what it is and control your thoughts. And remind yourself that the long-term gratification of honoring your decision is worth so much more than the instant gratification of Thai food. Okay? Be onto yourself.

The next piece to practicing consistency, is you keep showing up; you put in your reps. So, while you may have a goal of losing 10 pounds, it is not going to happen unless you stick to your plan. That means you keep making, bringing, and ultimately eating the salads that you bring with you to work. You keep eating your Greek yogurt, and you skip the bag pretzels, over and over again, daily. That's your process.

Showing up and putting in your reps? That's repeating the habit. And when you repeat the habits over time, the result will come. The result will speak for itself. The habit is not sexy, but the result that you get from it is. So, have your goal. Decide that you want to lose 10 pounds. But then decide the habits that will get you to that goal, and make that your priority.

Your priority is not losing 10 pounds. Your priority is eating the foods you planned out for yourself, even when you don't want to. And to piggyback off this, it will be much easier to keep showing up and being consistent when you've chosen small but impactful habits to practice. Remember, small equals sustainable.

Choose a habit, like giving up one processed food snack that comes in a foil wrapper, in exchange for a piece of fruit and a string cheese. That's not huge. It's not wild, but it's doable. And that's exactly the point. When you choose a small habit that is reasonable, that will have an impact, and you can get yourself to do it, then you're setting yourself up for a win. And I want to see you getting wins as early, and as often as possible.

It's that whole self-efficacy thing. When you set a goal, no matter how small, and you achieve it, that fuels self-efficacy; your belief in your ability

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to do what you set out to do. So, take the self-efficacy you get from small wins, and use it to produce more wins for yourself.

When you execute a habit successfully. It feels good. It tells your brain, “Hey, that was good. I liked that. That felt awesome. Let's do it again.” Small wins breed more action, which in turn breeds consistency. And that is a really great self-perpetuating cycle.

And at the same time, do not let failure derail you. Again, we're looking for consistency here, not perfection. Do not let one misstep, stop the process altogether. You are not undoing everything if you eat ice cream for dinner. It's only a failure if you let it stop you. Recognize the stumble, own it, accept it, and keep going. Pick up where you left off, and make your next decision one that you can be proud of.

And the last thing I want to add here, is that for some people, having an accountability partner makes a big difference in establishing consistency. And as a coach, that's part of what I do. I hold you accountable. I ask you questions. We make a plan together during our coaching sessions, and then we follow up. I will ask how it went executing your plan.

For most people that serves as enough of an impetus to get you going. If you know I'm going to be asking how it went having no drinks over the weekend, like you planned, you may be more inclined to skip the drinks, because I'm going to ask about it and hold you accountable.

And some people need that outside influence in order to follow through and be consistent. So, whether it's a coach, a personal trainer, a running buddy, whoever it is, having someone to answer to may help keep you accountable. All right?

There are a number of ways I just went over to help you establish consistency. And if you're thinking to yourself, “She's making the sound so simple,” I got you. But at the risk of ruffling your feathers, let me ask: What if it was that simple? What if it was as simple as you keep showing up and repeating small behaviors and paying attention to yourself?

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Why does it have to be complicated? It doesn't. If there's anything you take away from this episode, hopefully it's that consistency does not have to be complicated at all, really.

Honestly, it's when we insert our thoughts and limiting beliefs and perfectionism and all-or-nothing thinking into the mix, that consistency gets complicated. But if I can help you remove some of the drama and mind chatter and mental load related to habit change, and boil it down to make it simple and doable for you, then I'm doing what I set out to do.

Consistency does not have to be hard. Remember the math equation: Consistency = Practice + Repetition + Frequency. You do the behavior, you repeat the behavior, and you do it at a rate that it becomes automatic. That is your formula for consistency, right there. All right?

So, there it is. I hope you leave this episode today seeing consistency just a little differently. For some of you, consistency is an uphill battle. But it's largely a struggle because of how you're thinking about your habits. Rather than make it complicated, try taking a simpler approach. Have a goal that focus on the behaviors that will get you to that goal. Make your changes small, doable, and sustainable.

Don't let a misstep spell doom and stop altogether. Be onto yourself, and pay attention when you start to justify yourself out of doing what you said you're going to do. And keep showing up. At the risk of sounding like a Hallmark card, the only way to fail at this is if you quit. And if you hang out with me, I'm not going to let you quit. Okay?

And if you want more help with this, let's talk. This is what we do in coaching sessions. When you coach with me, yes, I will most definitely hold you accountable. But more importantly, we engineer habits based on your goals, and then you put them into practice. Most importantly, we troubleshoot what is keeping you from being consistent, your mind.

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If you've got goals and you're tired of being inconsistent, let's talk. Check out my website. Go to www.CarrieHollandMD.com/contact and tell me what's keeping you stuck. Then, let's get to work and change it. All right?

So, thank you, again, for hanging out with me. And I'll catch you again next week.

If you like what you've been hearing, please review the show. I would love to get your feedback and ideas. Your suggestions have inspired episodes and will help me make the show better for you. And share this podcast with a friend, text a show link, share a screenshot, or post a link to the show on your social media. Be sure to tag me @CarrieHollandMD on either Instagram or Facebook, so I can follow along and engage with you.

This is how we get the word out to other working moms who want to feel strong, inside and out. If you know someone who wants to feel better or eat and move differently but she is too tired or too busy, it is time to change things up. And you know, making that change starts with how you think. And that is what we do here on the *Strong as a Working Mom* podcast. I'll 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 to match, visit me at CarrieHollandMD.com.