

The Consequences and Health Risks of Weight Cycling and How It Can Be Prevented

Bentley Cunningham
University of Tennessee Martin, Dietetic Intern

Background:

Weight cycling, also known as “Yo-Yo dieting” is when a person repeatedly loses and gains weight usually due to participating in weight loss diets. This commonly affects people that are classified as obese or overweight. However, in today’s society, people of all ages and sizes can be affected by weight cycling. This includes people within their normal weight range, people underweight, teens, adolescents, and athletes. There are many reasons weight cycling occurs but some of the main reasons include:

- Participating in diet/diet program that is overly restrictive.
 - Keto, Juice Cleanse, Optavia
- Using extreme measures to lower caloric intake.
 - Intermittent Fasting, Skipping Meals
- Setting unrealistic goals for weight loss and how long it will take to lose weight.
 - Attempting to lose 10lbs in 1 week

Other Factors that Contribute to Weight Cycling:

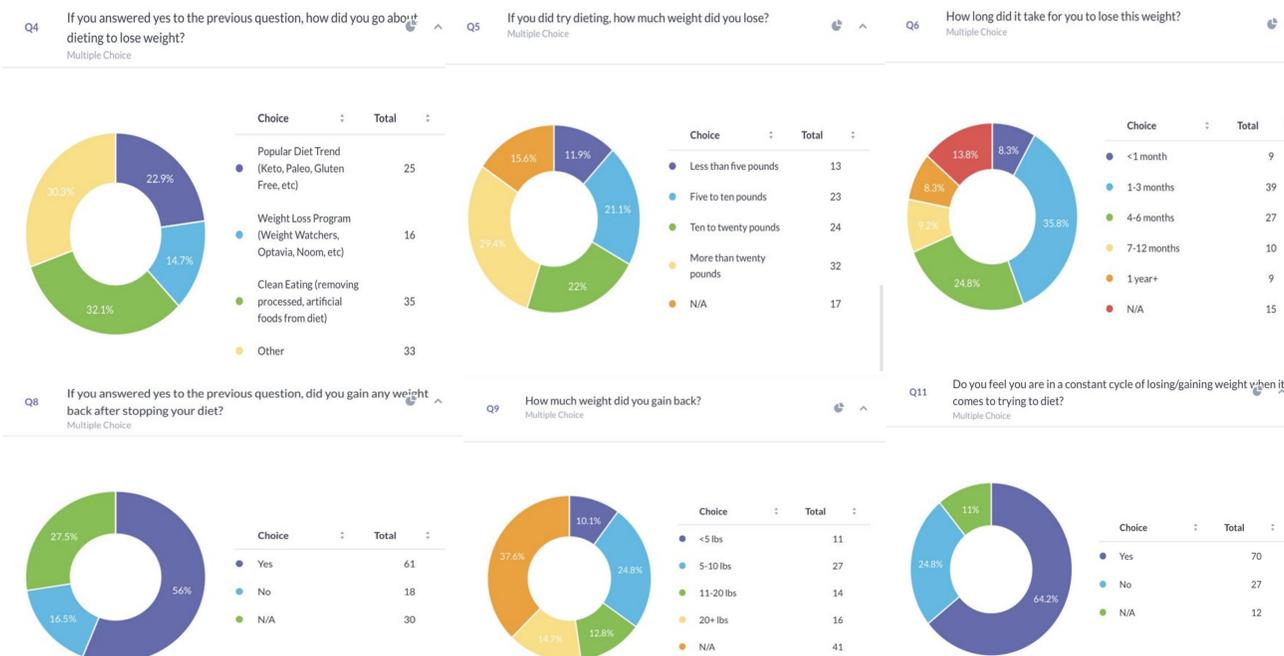
- Social Media
 - In today’s society, we are exposed to an ideal body type that everyone should have.
 - This can lead people to want to constantly diet and exercise to try and meet these standards.
- Home Environment
 - A person may be exposed to a family member(s) that are constantly dieting to lose weight.
 - Children are especially impressionable by their parents. If they are exposed at a young age, then it could lead to them utilizing the same diets/diet programs to constantly lose weight as well.

How Can Dietitians Help Prevent Weight Cycling?

- Help clients focus on healthy habits rather than weight loss.
- Encourage clients not to overly restrict with their diets.
- Encourage clients not to separate foods into “good” and “bad” categories
- Educate clients on why fad diets/diet programs are not good for them.
- Teach clients about intuitive eating.
- Be kind with the clients and help them develop a better relationship with their own body image.

Weight Cycling Survey Results:

- 109 Participants; 100 females, 9 males
- Main age groups: 16-24 yrs. old, 55-64 yrs. old



How Weight Cycling Causes These Consequences to Occur Cont'd:

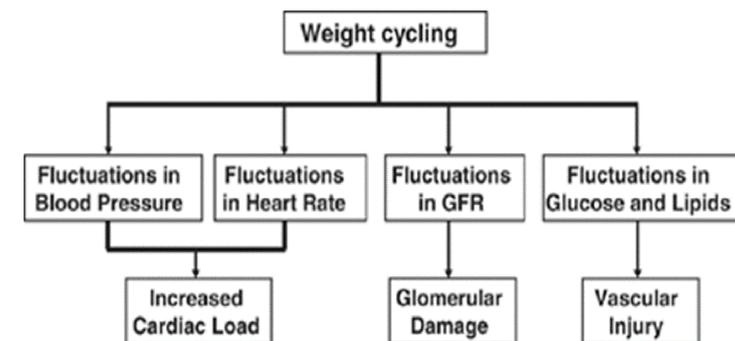
- The “Set Point” Theory
 - Can be described as when the human body works to maintain body weight within a set range.
 - A person’s “set weight” is determined through many variables, such as:
 - Environment
 - Genetics
 - Preferences

Consequences of Weight Cycling:

- Eating Disorders
- Obesity
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Psychological Disorders

How Weight Cycling Causes These Consequences to Occur:

- The “Repeated Overshoot” Theory
 - When cardiovascular risk factors are overshoot during a period of weight gain in the weight cycling process.
 - This repeated overshoot could lead to overall cardiovascular morbidity.
 - During rapid weight regain, after food restriction has occurred, fluctuations in cardiovascular risk factors, such as blood pressure, heart rate, GFR, glucose, triglycerides, and cholesterol can lead to enhanced risks of developing cardiovascular diseases.



The “Repeated Overshoot” Theory

References

1. Overweight/Obesity: Potential Perils of Weight Cycling - Today's Dietitian Magazine. (n.d.). [www.todaysdietitian.com](https://www.todaysdietitian.com/newarchives/0517p18.shtml). Retrieved March 26, 2022, from <https://www.todaysdietitian.com/newarchives/0517p18.shtml>
2. Weight Cycling, Definition, Demographics, Description, Causes. (n.d.). Reference.jrank.org. Retrieved March 26, 2022, from https://reference.jrank.org/diets/Weight_Cycling.html
3. Why you should avoid fad diets. (n.d.). Reid Health. <https://www.reidhealth.org/blog/fad-diets-the-new-years-resolutions-worst-enemy>
4. Rhee, E.-J. (2017). Weight Cycling and Its Cardiometabolic Impact. *Journal of Obesity & Metabolic Syndrome*, 26(4), 237–242. <https://doi.org/10.7570/jomes.2017.26.4.237>
5. Montani, J.-P., Vieceili, A., Prevot, A., & Dulloo, A. (2006). Weight cycling during growth and beyond as a risk factor for later cardiovascular diseases: The “repeated overshoot” theory [Review of Weight cycling during growth and beyond as a risk factor for later cardiovascular diseases: The “repeated overshoot” theory]. *International Journal of Obesity*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/51374438_Weight_cycling_during_growth_and_beyond_as_a_risk_factor_for_later_cardiovascular_diseases_The_repeated_overshoot_theory
6. Alexander, H. (n.d.). Does your body have a set point weight and can you change it? MD Anderson Cancer Center. Retrieved March 26, 2022, from <https://www.mdanderson.org/publications/focused-on-health/what-is-your-body-s-set-point-weight-and-can-you-change-it-h15-1593780.html>
7. Fleps, B. (2021, April 21). Social media effects on body image and eating disorders. News; Illinois State University. <https://news.illinoisstate.edu/2021/04/social-media-effects-on-body-image-and-eating-disorders/>
8. Why we should try Intuitive Eating. (n.d.). Live Well with Izzy. Retrieved March 26, 2022, from <https://www.livewellwithizzy.com/blog/why-we-should-try-intuitive-eating>



Conclusion

With the rise of social media and the ongoing amount of misinformation about nutrition being spread, there is no surprise that weight cycling is becoming a bigger and bigger problem everyday. As shown by the survey, people of all ages are still continuously trying to diet to lose weight and are unsuccessful almost every time. While there are studies out there that explain how weight cycling can cause serious consequences for people, there are still more studies that should be conducted to obtain a better conclusion. Regardless, dietitians need to be aware of this issue and learn the proper ways to effectively help their client.