

What happens when exercises don't trigger weight loss

BY ROBERT MADOI

It's a recurring question that confronts weight-watchers whose enormous appetite for exercises does not quite translate into weight loss: why don't I lose nearly as much weight as I burn calories? An analysis of 14 trials spanning 450 people has, by some distance, provided answers.

In what they described as a 28 percent rule, researchers at Duke

72%

Body weight.
The amount
of the calories
burned during
exercise that actually contribute
to a total daily
increase.

University in the US observed that the human body makes up for an exercise in increased activity by reducing energy expenditure on other biological functions by 28 percent. This essentially means that only about 72 percent of the calories burned during exercise actually contribute to a total daily increase.

"The real killer here is that if you pair exercise with diet, your body goes, 'Fine, well, then I'm going to compensate more.' It's still good for

you, just not for weight loss," Duke University's Herman Pontzer told the *New Scientist*.

But does the human body really limit how much energy one can burn? While there is sufficient evidence to come to the conclusion that exercise is fundamental to overall health, when melded with a strict adherence to dieting, it becomes less effective. At least for weight loss. A broad-brush approach, though, is ill-advised. The fact that individuals with higher

body fat levels typically experience more aggressive energy compensation means that situations are considered case by case.

The exercise type also matters. Pontzer, who was joined by Eric Trexler, also at Duke University, for the analysis, found aerobic exercise to be particularly ineffective for weight loss. The trials the pair analysed further showed that resistance training has a markedly different outcome from what aerobic exercises typically muster. The

former has a lower compensation rate simply because the body uses energy to build and repair muscle.

Addressing the question as to how aerobic exercises bring with them a higher compensation rate, Pontzer and Trexler's analysis shows that the resting metabolic rate might be altered by a running or biking activity.

The analysis has not been short on critics. Besides discouraging people from exercising, critics contend that Pontzer and Trexler's study lacks nuance. Its obsession with weight loss ensures that metabolic health benefits are overlooked.