The Weight-Loss Plateau Troubleshooting Checklist

A 5-point self-audit for a stalled scale — in the order worth checking them.

01 SLEEP — CHECK THIS FIRST

Controlled research matching calorie intake exactly found people sleeping 5.5 hrs/night lost 55% less fat and 60% more muscle than at 8.5 hrs — same deficit. Are you averaging 7+ hours most nights?

02 NEAT — ARE YOU QUIETLY SITTING MORE?

Lab measurements found spontaneous daily movement (NEAT) can differ by roughly 100–800 cal/day between people, and it can drop unnoticed once a diet starts. Compare your activity level to a month or two ago.

03 PROTEIN — ARE YOU ACTUALLY HITTING IT?

Dieters need roughly 1.8–2.7 g/kg bodyweight — higher than general guidance. Total one full day's intake rather than estimating it.

04 TRACKING ACCURACY

Gold-standard (doubly-labeled water) research found dieters underreported intake by an average of 47% and overreported exercise by 51%. Track everything, bites and oil included, for 3–5 days.

05 TIME AT THE CURRENT APPROACH

Metabolic adaptation is real (-610 cal/day beyond expected in one study) but is usually the explanation only after the first four points are ruled out, not before.

06 SUMMARY: FIVE-POINT AUDIT

CHECK	WHAT "OFF TRACK" LOOKS LIKE
Sleep	Averaging under 7 hrs most nights this week
NEAT / daily movement	Noticeably less walking or standing than a month ago
Protein	Haven't actually totaled it on a real day this week
Tracking accuracy	Estimating instead of logging, or skipping bites/drinks/oil
Time at this approach	Less than 2–3 weeks of honestly checking the above

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR THE NERVOUS SYSTEM & GUT

Four of these five checkpoints are really one system wearing different names. A nervous system that's under-recovered or under chronic stress shifts the body toward conserving energy, not releasing it — that's a signal to address first, not a flaw to push through with a bigger deficit.

07 QUICK TAKEAWAYS

- **Check sleep first**
  The single factor most likely to be quietly working against an otherwise correct plan.
- **NEAT and tracking explain most "mystery" stalls**
  Both are easy to underestimate without cutting calories further.
- **Metabolic adaptation is real — check it last**
  Rule out the other four first; it's the minority explanation, not the majority.

Sources: Nedeltcheva et al., Ann. Intern. Med. (2010) · Levine et al., ATVB (2006) · Helms et al., IJSNEM (2014) · Lichtman et al., NEJM (1992) · Fothergill et al., Obesity (2016).
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