

The Hidden Cost of Quick Weight Loss



Two chapters of my life. Decades of lessons about weight, dieting, and health.

The Promise of Fast Results

Who wouldn't want to lose 10, 15, or 20 pounds in just a few weeks? The promise of fast results can be incredibly tempting, especially when we've struggled with our weight for years.

But what if the fastest way to lose weight comes with a price you never expected?

I know that temptation firsthand. In my early twenties, I followed the popular grapefruit diet, severely restricting what I ate because I desperately wanted to lose 20 pounds.

And I lost those 20 pounds very quickly. But I felt awful throughout the process. My digestion suffered, and even though I wasn't feeling well, I kept going because I believed the promises of the diet and wanted so badly to reach my goal.

Several years later, after becoming a mother, I suffered a severe gallbladder attack and my gallbladder was surgically removed. It wasn't until decades later that I learned rapid weight loss and severe calorie restriction are recognized risk factors for gallstones. While I can't say for certain that the grapefruit diet caused my gallbladder problems, the possible connection is difficult to ignore.

My digestion took time to recover, but I finally felt like myself again. For a while, I was back on track, as you can see in the first photograph.

Unfortunately, the weight gradually began creeping back. After my first child, I struggled to lose the pregnancy weight. By the time I had my second child, I found myself facing something I never could have imagined as a young woman: **80 pounds to lose.**

What I once believed was a quick solution became the beginning of a much longer struggle with my weight.

And it raises an important question:

What's happening inside our bodies when we push ourselves to lose weight as quickly as possible?

Extreme dieting can do more than leave you hungry. Rapid weight loss can increase your risk of gallstones, contribute to muscle loss, and trigger changes in metabolism and appetite that make keeping the weight off more challenging.

Before you start another quick-fix diet, there's something important you deserve to know.

1. Rapid Weight Loss Can Increase the Risk of Gallstones

One of the lesser-known risks of crash dieting is the development of gallstones.

Rapid weight loss can increase cholesterol in bile, while severe calorie restriction can prevent the gallbladder from emptying properly. Together, these changes can encourage gallstones to form.

Gallstones can remain unnoticed for years before causing severe pain or complications requiring surgery. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) identifies rapid weight loss and very-low-calorie diets as recognized risk factors.

My Personal Experience

As I shared earlier, I lost 20 pounds very quickly on the grapefruit diet in my early twenties.

About a year later, I became pregnant with my first child. I've since learned that **pregnancy is another recognized risk factor for gallstones**. Hormonal changes can increase cholesterol in bile and slow gallbladder emptying.

At age 28, several years after my crash diet and first pregnancy, I suffered a severe gallbladder attack and had my gallbladder surgically removed.

For decades, I never connected these events. I didn't know that gallstones could develop silently or that both rapid weight loss and pregnancy could contribute to their formation.

I can't know whether my grapefruit diet, pregnancy, or a combination of factors contributed to my gallbladder problems. But understanding these recognized risks has made me look at those years very differently.

I lost 20 pounds very quickly. But what was happening inside my body while I was celebrating the weight I'd lost?

That's a question I wish I'd known to ask back then.

2. Could Extreme Dieting Affect Thyroid Health?

I've often wondered whether the extreme grapefruit diet I followed in my early twenties contributed to the thyroid problems I developed later.

Research shows that severe calorie restriction can lower levels of T3, an active thyroid hormone that helps regulate how much energy our bodies use. This is one way the body adapts to receiving less food.

Although these changes don't establish a connection to my later thyroid diagnosis, they demonstrate how extreme dieting can affect the body's normal functions.

Losing weight quickly can affect far more than the number on the scale.

It's another reason I believe in balanced nutrition and a realistic approach to weight loss that people can maintain.

3. Extreme Dieting Can Cost You More Than Body Fat

When we lose weight quickly, we may lose muscle along with body fat. This matters because muscle supports our strength, physical function, and the energy our bodies use each day.

Severely restrictive diets can also make it difficult to get enough protein, vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients.

Possible consequences include:

- Loss of muscle and strength
- Fatigue and reduced energy
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Constipation, nausea, or other digestive problems

These aren't reasons to avoid losing weight when weight loss would benefit your health.

They're reasons to pay attention to **how you're losing it**.

A weight-loss approach should support your body, not simply force the scale downward as quickly as possible.

4. Why Keeping the Weight Off Can Be Harder Than Losing It

Have you ever lost weight, only to find yourself struggling to keep it off?

As we lose weight, our bodies generally need less energy than they did when we were heavier. Weight loss can also increase hunger, making it more difficult to maintain our results.

I experienced this firsthand with Noom. Each time I lost another five pounds, my daily calorie allowance was reduced. By the time I stopped using the program, I was down to approximately 1,150 calories a day.

When I developed Thrive, I approached things differently.

Throughout my weight-loss journey, I averaged approximately 1,300–1,350 calories a day without continually reducing my intake. I focused on balanced meals, satisfying portions, and nutritious foods, including fewer highly processed products.

And when I reached maintenance, something surprised me. I was able to gradually increase my daily intake by approximately 500 calories while keeping my weight stable—something I'd struggled to do with previous diets.

I can't say that any one factor explains the difference. But for me, **eating well, following a consistent plan, and learning how to maintain my results made a remarkable difference.**

Losing weight is one achievement. Learning how to live comfortably at your new weight is another.

5. The Frustrating Cycle of Losing and Regaining

For many people, the story doesn't end when the diet ends.

They lose weight, return to their usual eating habits, regain some or all of the weight, and eventually start another diet.

Sometimes the next diet is even more restrictive because they're desperate to get results.

And the cycle begins again.

Repeated dieting can become physically and emotionally exhausting.

There may be periods of inadequate nutrition, hunger, frustration, discouragement, and the feeling that another attempt has failed.

The medical evidence does not establish that everyone who repeatedly diets permanently damages their metabolism. But it does show that rapid weight loss is associated with greater difficulty maintaining results, and that weight loss can trigger biological changes that favor regain.

The NIDDK also identifies weight cycling as a factor that may increase the risk of gallstone problems.

Losing the same pounds over and over isn't the lasting success most people are looking for.

The real goal is to develop habits that help you maintain your progress.

6. Why Sustainable Weight Loss Matters More Than Speed

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) explains that people who lose weight gradually—typically around one to two pounds per week—are more likely to maintain their results.

My own experiences taught me that **how we lose weight matters just as much as how quickly we lose it.**

With Noom, I lost 20 pounds over two years, while my daily calorie allowance was repeatedly reduced as I lost weight.

With Thrive, I lost 15 pounds during the eight-week meal plan, averaging nearly two pounds per week. I lost five pounds the first week, followed by approximately one to two pounds weekly. I continued losing during Stabilizing and reached a total loss of 20 pounds in just three and a half months—all without continually reducing my starting calorie intake.

Most importantly, I've maintained that loss for a year and a half while increasing my daily intake by approximately 500 calories.

The real success wasn't just losing those 20 pounds. It was learning how to keep them off.

That's why I believe a weight-loss plan should focus on balanced nutrition, realistic routines, and long-term maintenance—not simply how quickly the pounds disappear.

7. Why Thrive Includes Three Phases

When I developed Thrive with Isabelle™, I didn't want another program that focused entirely on getting the weight off.

I'd spent too many years experiencing the frustration of diets that worked temporarily but were difficult to maintain.

I wanted an approach that addressed what happens **during weight loss and afterward**.

That's why Thrive includes three distinct phases.

Phase 1 — Weight Loss

The eight-week meal plan provides structured, balanced meals designed to take much of the nutritional planning and guesswork out of everyday eating.

Protein, fiber, calcium, and other important nutrients are incorporated into meals, with everyday foods, practical recipes, planned leftovers, and options for eating out.

The emphasis is on nourishing your body while working toward your weight-loss goal—not starving yourself to reach a number as quickly as possible.

Phase 2 — Stabilizing

This is one of the most important differences in the Thrive approach.

Rather than reaching a goal and immediately returning to old habits, you deliberately transition from losing weight to maintaining it.

You gradually adjust your food intake while continuing the routines you've developed.

You learn what maintaining your weight looks like in real life.

The purpose of stabilizing is practical: to help you make the transition from a weight-loss plan to a sustainable maintenance routine.

Phase 3 — Maintenance

This is where the habits you've developed become part of everyday life.

You continue enjoying balanced meals, make adjustments when necessary, and use the tools you've learned to recognize changes before they become larger setbacks.

There is no need to start another extreme diet every time life gets busy or your weight fluctuates.

The goal is to build a way of eating you can return to, rely on, and live with.

8. What I Wish I'd Known Years Ago

Looking back at the grapefruit diet, my gallbladder surgery, and the many years I spent trying different weight-loss programs, I wish someone had explained all of this to me when I was younger.

For decades, especially during the height of the diet craze in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, we were surrounded by advertisements promising that the next diet would finally be the answer.

And I believed I needed one of those diets to lose weight.

What makes that especially interesting is that I wasn't unfamiliar with nutrition. I had taken college nutrition courses and spent years studying and researching healthy eating. **I had the knowledge, but I hadn't yet figured out how to put all the pieces together.**

I truly believed Noom was going to be the answer. Its advertisements made it sound like I'd finally found the program that would help me lose weight and keep it off.

And I gave it my best effort. Over two years, I lost 20 pounds, but every time I lost another five pounds, my daily calorie allowance was reduced. I struggled with the constant tracking, the app, and figuring out what to eat within its color-coded food system.

Then my husband became seriously ill, and life changed. I simply didn't have the time or energy to devote to managing the program anymore. I had to stop.

Over the next two years, the 20 pounds gradually crept back on.

That's when I finally realized something important: **I didn't need another diet that required me to organize my life around it. I needed a way of eating that could fit into my life—even when life became difficult.**

I wouldn't call my experience with Noom a failure. It was an awakening.

Maybe the answer wasn't another commercial weight-loss program. Maybe it was time to take everything I'd learned and put those pieces together for myself.

I developed Thrive around balanced meals, practical routines, and something I'd come to understand was essential: **a plan for keeping the weight off after losing it.**

Because eventually, every weight-loss diet ends.

What matters is what you've learned, the habits you've developed, and whether you have a realistic way to continue.

For me, success wasn't simply losing 20 pounds.

It was learning how to maintain that loss while continuing to enjoy food, family, restaurants, holidays, and the life I love.

When I saw the results for myself—not just losing the weight but keeping it off—I knew I had to share what I'd learned. And that's how Thrive with Isabelle™ was born.

A Final Thought

Before beginning another diet promising dramatic results, ask yourself three questions:

1. Will this approach nourish my body while I'm losing weight?
2. Can I realistically continue these eating habits after reaching my goal?
3. Does the plan teach me how to maintain my results?

If the answer is no, it may be worth reconsidering.

Losing weight matters. But how you lose it—and how you live afterward—matters just as much.

Healthy Eating, Built for Life.

Sources & Further Reading

The following medical and scientific resources support the research and health information discussed in this guide.

1. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)

Dieting & Gallstones

Explains how rapid weight loss, changes in bile composition, and reduced gallbladder emptying can increase gallstone risk. Also discusses weight cycling.

<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/gallstones/dieting>

2. MedlinePlus — U.S. National Library of Medicine

Diet for Rapid Weight Loss

Describes potential consequences of rapid weight loss, including muscle loss, gallstones, fatigue, and difficulty maintaining results.

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000885.htm>

3. National Institutes of Health (NIH)

Obesity and Metabolic Health

Explains how changes in energy expenditure and appetite can make weight loss and maintenance challenging.

<https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/obesity-metabolic-health>

4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Steps for Losing Weight

Discusses gradual weight loss, healthy eating habits, and the importance of sustainable lifestyle changes.

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/losing-weight/>

5. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)

Eating & Physical Activity to Lose or Maintain Weight

Explains metabolic changes during weight loss and the role of continued healthy habits in maintenance.

<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/adult-overweight-obesity/eating-physical-activity>

6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Tips for Keeping Weight Off

Provides practical, research-informed recommendations for maintaining weight loss through consistent eating and activity habits.

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/losing-weight/keeping-it-off.html>

7. CALERIE research review

[Endocrine Alterations in Response to Calorie Restriction in Humans](#). Reviews observed changes in T3 and other hormones during calorie restriction.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3856718>

8. Merck Manual — Cholelithiasis.

Explains gallbladder sludge, its relationship to pregnancy, and how sludge can sometimes develop into gallstones.

<https://www.merckmanuals.com/professional/hepatic-and-biliary-disorders/gallbladder-and-bile-duct-disorders/cholelithiasis>

Educational Note: This guide provides general information about weight management and is not medical advice. Rapid weight loss may be medically appropriate for certain individuals under professional supervision. Anyone with medical conditions or concerns about weight-loss treatment should consult a qualified healthcare professional.

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