

PERFORMANCE MENU

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42 Ways to Skin the Zone

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Have you ever heard the term "If all you have is a hammer all the world looks like a nail"? How about "You can put lipstick on a pig...but it's still a pig"? How about "**Joey...do you like movies about Gladiators?**" Two of those statements are analogies and one is a classic movie line...all are an attempt at an interesting introduction to all things Zone. The intro is always fraught with danger and difficulties. Much like stealing food from an O-lifter or bare-back sex in the Mission District...I hear both are VERY dangerous. Anyway... I've noticed on the CrossFit message board and a few other locations, confusion on how to make the Zone work. Some of the well-intentioned advice is similar to the analogies above. Trying to make one flavor of the Zone work for everyone and or making the Zone something it is not. Both activities have caused me to resort to Gladiator movies, which my Parole Officer has strongly recommended against. Hence this article. Much in the vein of Freud and Jung I want to look at a few archetypes that constitute most of the questions surrounding the Zone. Let's take a look at these folks.

The Gyro With A Thousand Faces

Before we really jump into this I need to point out that I am assuming a basic comprehension of the Zone. You have read and understand some resources like the **CrossFit Journal issue 21**, the witty and reasonably priced **Performance Menu issue 2** which received the accolade "It didn't suck" from some guy on MMA. tv, or even the holiest of holies, the book that broke America's carb addiction...until Ornish and McDougall got them back on the crack...Barry "I can't follow my own diet advice" Sears' Masterpiece... that wrongly states protein is the cause of ketosis...**Enter The Zone**. If you have not read these things, can't figure the block method... you are beyond help. Just do what Oprah is doing...it will be better that way. If you are past the

training wheels stage but are not quite ready for the **Huffy 10 speed**...this article is for you. OK, back to the real fun. Let's look at our first Zone contestant: "Do I have to eat ALL of that?!"

DIHTEAT

Yes...DIHTEAT has figured out blocks, how many he or she needs and is chugging along nicely. DIHTEAT is dutifully eating all carbohydrates in the form of low glycemic load veggies...and this individual devotes more than 10 hours per day chewing food but only 2.8 nano seconds dropping stool in the LOO. Solution? It seems pretty obvious to use some dense carb sources like fruit or yams but this may not be an easy or straight forward thing. Dense carb sources can turn one into an Always Hungry Carb Crash Zombie (AHCCZ... see below). Nobody likes that so one must do one of several things:

1. Ratchet up the dense carbs slowly. For example if you have historically choked down 3 blocks of carbs in the form of broccoli, try swapping in one block of apple or yam for a block of broccoli. See how you feel. If you are "OK" try 2 blocks of apple or yam. Still "OK" or do you need a binky and a nap? We certainly want to solve the problem of too many veggies to eat but not at the expense of losing glycemic control. Tinker and see what happens. Perhaps you need to use option 2.
2. Eat some dense carb sources in your post workout meal. I have used this method with much success and it really streamlines my eating as I only require one meal with dense carbs and then my subsequent meals are protein, veggies and good fats. Taking advantage of the post workout window enhances insulin sensitivity and allows one to skirt some of the issues of a carbier

meal. I use about 50% of my daily carb allotment in post workout meals that follow a very demanding training session, about 8 blocks, or it may be as small as 4-6 blocks for a lighter workout. If I have not trained in a given day or if I find it impossible to get in all my carb blocks I employ option 3.

3. Just delete some damn carb blocks! It is complete crap that you need to balance every Zone meal... or even keep the original 40-30-30 ratio intact. The Athletes Zone in which one increases the fat by as much as 5 times is testament to this fact. The Athletes Zone changes the ratios to ~ 25-15-60! The Zone is effective in that it introduces a caloric deficit yet provides adequate protein for muscle maintenance and just a smidge of fat for hormone balance. On a ramped up Athletes Zone one consumes a high fat diet that promotes fat as a primary fuel source. That's it. There are other methods that provide similar results but the Zone is nice due to its block system and ubiquitous societal exposure...but don't turn it into magic folks. You CAN delete carb blocks depending upon your needs. Like in one of the above situations if you are having problems with either glycemic control or just packing in the carb blocks, just delete a given number of carb blocks and add 3 fat blocks for each carb block deleted.

Let's look at a typical day for me:

16 blocks at 5x fat. That means 16 blocks of protein, potentially 16 blocks of carbs and at least 80 blocks of fat (16 x 5). Let's say I do a hard workout and take in a 4 block protein meal, 8 blocks of carbs and 0 blocks of fat. In the later meals I want to keep things simple and remain with 4 block protein meals and only 2 blocks of carbs at each meal...things look like this:

4P	8C	0F
4P	2C	?F
4P	2C	?F
4P	2C	?F
Totals: 16P 14C		

How much Fat? Well, at the 5X level I need 80 blocks of fat, that's a given. Since I will finish out the day with only 14 blocks of carbs I need to add 6 blocks of fat to make up the caloric deficit. So I need 86 blocks of fat for the day. Since I have one protein and carb meal with essentially no fat I have 3 remaining meals to get those fat blocks in. Obviously you can break things into smaller, more frequent meals if you like...I'm trying to minimize my time in the kitchen so the 4 meals works for me. I need 86 blocks of fat to reach my days allotment and stay in the quasi-erotic Zone Bliss state. It might be

nice if 86 partitioned easily into 3 equal pieces...but alas it does not. $86/3=28.6$. Being the rebel that I am, however, I'd recommend 29 blocks per meal. In that case things look like this:

4P	8C	0F
4P	2C	29F
4P	2C	29F
4P	2C	29F
Totals: 16P 14C 87F		

Pretty **Fracking** close. Not just that but for me this is soooooo much easier than trying to balance every meal. I'm fairly organized but one of the things that has killed the Zone for me in the past was trying to adhere to the same macronutrient ratio at EVERY meal. What if I run out of apples? What carb source can I get while eating out that does not require a trough to eat from? With the above method I can get 4 oz of chicken or meat, a salad and ask for extra olive oil. Easy meal, good glycemic control and no bullshit. Ok enough of that noise. Let's go talk with the Always Hungry Carb Crash Zombie.

AHCCZ

One must approach the AHCCZ with caution. This individual has typically just started the Zone and may feel like they are being both starved and abused. It would not be a good idea to tie pork chops to oneself while near this person. Now that the safety issues are covered let's talk about what's happening with the AHCCZ. In a nutshell this person is getting too many carbs, too often. Many people who adopt a very low carb diet notice no hunger AT ALL. One may not be able to be a CrossFit Rock Star on Atkins carb levels but one will also not turn into the AHCCZ. Typically the AHCCZ is eating dense carbs sources like fruit, yams, bread and the like at EVERY meal and it is not working out well. Barry Sears offers a flow chart in *Mastering The Zone* that recommends deleting one carb block from a meal if one is hungry and foggy headed a few hours after a meal. Sage advice...I'd recommend replacing that carb block with 3 blocks of fat as we talked about above. One can also shift towards less dense carb sources but that can be a slippery slope towards DIHTEAT.

Let's suppose you are a female on 10 blocks and you are trying to lose a fair amount of body fat. You have just started exercising, so your intensity is pretty moderate. You have dutifully followed the Zone and you are an AHCCZ. Here is something you might try. Shoot for 4

meals. Only have a block, perhaps two of carbs in the form of low carb-density veggies like broccoli, kale, spinach, etc. The day might look like this:

3P	2C	?F
3P	2C	?F
2P	1C	?F
2P	1C	?F
Totals: 10P	6C	?F

In this scenario we are looking at 10 blocks of protein, and an easy to chew, non-insulin spiking 6 blocks of carbs...but how much fat does our recovering AHCCZ need? Since this poor soul is still on the base Zone she would need only 10 blocks in the normal Zone world, but we are a bit more sophisticated than that. Since we have deleted 4 blocks of carbs we need to add 12 blocks of fat for a whopping total of 24! This can be partitioned any way we like but 6 blocks at each meal makes sense:

3P	2C	6F
3P	2C	6F
2P	1C	6F
2P	1C	6F
Totals: 10P	6C	24F

Won't the Zone Police come and haul us away? Isn't this some violation of the Patriot Act? Why is **Allan Thicke** still one of the most recognizable Canadian actors to US citizens? The answers in this order: 1. No. 2. Probably not but if I disappear we know I pissed someone off "real good". 3. **De gustibus non est disputandum**.

What I'm trying to get across is that you have some serious flexibility with how you implement the Zone and instead of trying to make this a one-size-fits-all affair we can customize The Zone to make it YOUR Zone. Nifty, eh? In the above example we have established BETTER glycemic control than the standard Zone offers and our former AHCCZ will not become a DIHTEAT. Once the FAHCCZ (former always hungry carb crashed zombie) has reached a desired level of leanness the fat blocks will be ratcheted up to somewhere between 3 and 5x the base level...but that was discussed in the PM issue 2! What if this individual is ramping up the intensity of workouts and is not feeling recovered? Use the post workout carb method as mentioned above adding some dense carb sources...adjust fat blocks accordingly.

I just want to do a teensy digression here and talk about

the Black Box and empiricism. It is righteous to base decisions on empiricism and not get hung up on theory. Experiment, observe, experiment, observe...that's the schiznitz but occasionally some understanding of how things work can help to direct our efforts. If for example someone is not feeling good on the Zone it's neither elegant nor educated to simply say "hang in there, things will get better". Yes people botch the Zone but if people are having glycemic control issues (some obvious signs like hunger and foggy headed-ness) we have some easy ways of dealing with this IF we have not turned our Zone experience into a religion. Related to this is the assertion that anything goes with regards to food quality so long as it fits into a 40-30-30 ratio. That's retarded. No one should use Seitan (concentrated wheat gluten) as a protein source. Similarly some coaches seem to think it's impossible to eat "Meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds..." in Zone proportions....come again? When a tool ceases to be a tool and becomes an end unto itself...squirrelly crap can happen. OK. Back to our Zone fun...let's look at our next archetype "skinny but want to be heyuge" (SBWTBH).

SBWTBH

SBWTBH...typically a white male, 18-30 years of age, 5'9"-6'0", 140-160lbs. Known to train up to 7 days per week, often in double sessions. Chronic under-eater... yet finds gaining quality muscle mass a problem. Shocker. SBWTBH has landed on a message board near you and wants to know the secrets of being a sculpted Greek God...much in the likeness of **Greg Everett**. Well the solution to this problem is one word: EAT. OK, I'll flesh things out more than that. SBWTBH will need to engage in some smart progressive overload training, a minimum of extraneous activity and an acceptance that he may not be able to see all 8 of his lower abs for a period of time. This will necessitate a significant financial outlay not only for the food to fuel this endeavor but also the therapist to hand hold Lil' Jimmy through his loss of abs status. Once SBWTBH has funneled all of his financial aid money into groceries it's time to get down to some serious eating!

Similar to progressive overload we will employ a progressive approach to eating to allow the digestive system to adapt to larger meals and more total volume passing through the system. Start things at a base Zone for one week, then ratchet up to 5x fat and maintain this level for one week. This will initiate a protein sparing state in the body we will take advantage of periodically on the quest to gain a few kilos. So the above might look like one week at 16 blocks then one week at 16 blocks and 5X fat. Now every two weeks add 2 blocks at the 5x fat level until you have added

4 blocks. Hold this level for 3-4 weeks, then ratchet things up again. Approximately every 6th day go back to your ORIGINAL base Zone. Yep, all the way back to 16 blocks. Do this on a non-training day and try not to eat off your own arm. This practice will re-set your protein utilization AND your metabolism overall. Just a little tweak to keep the body efficient with calories and not shift towards frittering away all those pricey food calories by decoupling mitochondrial REDOX.

Cycling nutrient intake is nothing new. From Fred Hatfields Zig-Zag diet to Anabolic Burst Cycling to the Metabolic Diet, people have noticed that eating the same thing, day in day out is not the best way to gain muscle. We presented an exhaustive approach to Mass Gain in **Issue 17** of the Performance Menu. I suggested the inclusion of intermittent fasting to achieve metabolic changes favorable to mass gain. That's one approach but I think simply dialing the calories back significantly may be an easier solution. Let's see how all this plays out over a month or two:

Week 1	16 blocks
Week 2	16 blocks @ 5X fat
Week 3-4	18 Blocks @5X fat
Week 5-8	20 Blocks @5X fat
Week 9-11	22 Blocks @5X fat
Week 12-15	24 Blocks @5X fat
Week 16-17	26 Blocks @5X fat

Keep in mind that every 5-7 days drop things back to a base 16 blocks to give the digestion and metabolism a rest. The above approach SHOULD allow your system to adapt to the increasing food intake and will provide adequate calories (over 4K at the 26 block level) and protein (182g) for growth. This may appear to be on the low end of the protein scale for mass gain but I want to encourage the body to use fat as a fuel, not protein. If you are finding that you are simply not gaining weight you might try adding an additional 50% of your daily blocks in your post workout meal. So if you are at 26 blocks @ 5X fat try getting an additional meal of 13 blocks of protein post workout. What this effectively does is increase your protein blocks significantly. Under this scenario on training days you would consume 39 blocks of protein, 26 blocks of carbs and a stool loosening 195g of fat.

It is almost a certainty that you will need to use copious amounts of shakes, olive oil, coconut milk and nut butters to stuff down all these calories. Take probiotics daily and digestive enzymes with EVERY meal. Chew your shakes. Try not to delete carbs on this plan; however, you may benefit from partitioning more carbs into the post workout period, along with the increased protein. For more details and a training program to

accompany this hog-fest, read the mass gain issue.

Low-Carb Wrap

All right folks! I think we touched on the main issues I see crop up with regards to the Zone. I just want to make the point again that it's important to tailor any program, whether it's CrossFit, BJJ or the Zone to meet YOUR needs. A little understanding of how these technologies work makes this easy to do.

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