

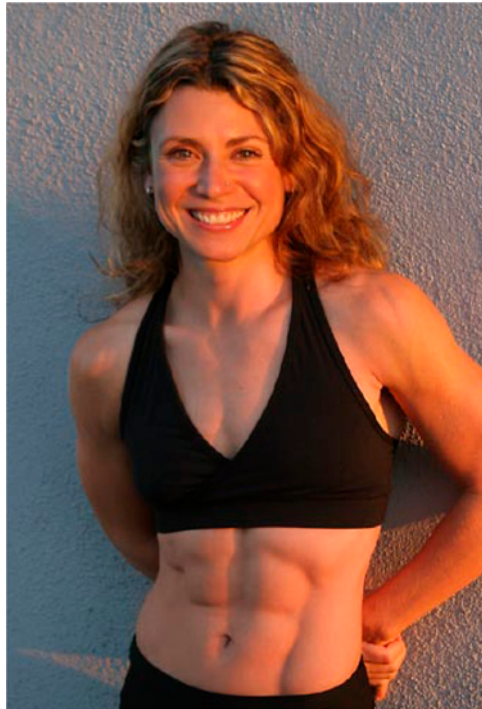
the **CrossFit** JOURNAL ARTICLES

Getting off the Crack

Nicole Carroll

I never thought what I ate mattered. I was thin and muscular. My athletic performance was decent. I generally felt pretty healthy and happy. So I was skeptical about diet having any kind of real impact on anything. For my whole life I had been eating a lot of whatever the hell I wanted and seemed to be doing just fine. But I did have a sense that this wasn't true for everyone and that as a trainer, people would be asking me questions about nutrition and diet. I knew CrossFit prescribed the Zone diet so I bought the books, read them, got my measly block prescription and tried the diet. The deal I made with myself was that for two weeks I would weigh and measure precisely. If after two weeks I wanted to go back to eating the way I was before I could. No guilt, just an experiment.

Four weeks into the Zone diet, I was stronger and faster than I had ever been. I had lost fat and gained muscle. My benchmark workout times decreased, and my pull-up numbers increased. I hit PRs in deadlift, back squat, and push jerk. I had more energy, recovered more quickly, and could push harder more often. Furthermore, I was happier and more emotionally balanced. I woke up feeling good. Best of all, I felt sharper. The tiny bit of hunger that remained kept me on an edge that I have come



to appreciate tremendously. I can only describe it as a state of readiness, of feeling honed physically and mentally.

CrossFitters know that people who ask "Where's the cardio?" in CrossFit haven't tried it. Likewise, people who question the efficacy of the Zone haven't stuck with it long enough, with enough precision, to feel its effects. Like CrossFit, if you do it, it works.

To do it right you need measuring cups, measuring spoons, a simple food scale, and a block chart. The first step is to find your daily block prescription—the total amount of food (protein, carb, and fat) you should eat every day—according to your height, weight, lean body mass, and activity level. Every meal

and every snack contains equal blocks of protein, carbohydrate, and fat, but you decide which foods of each type to eat. You choose the ingredients; the chart determines the quantity. (For specifics, see the "Meal Plans" issue of the CrossFit Journal [issue 21, May 2004] and any of Barry Sears's Zone books.)

Simple.

But far from easy. Most of us are incredibly addicted to carbohydrates, and most of us eat way more food than

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we need to thrive. We might compare cutting back on carbs to kicking a crack habit and laugh. Or maybe we hear a statement such as “Americans dig their graves with their teeth” and shudder. Extreme, perhaps, but not so far from the truth. Any of the great books mentioned in the “Food” issue of the CrossFit Journal (issue 15, November 2003) will give you science to support these assertions. What I want to say is simpler: Do the diet! Do the math to find your block prescription and then weigh and measure your food for at least two weeks. It’s worth the struggle a hundred times over.

That said, at ten blocks per day, I found the first three weeks of the Zone to be some of the hardest days of my life.

Day 1: The 3pm tuna sandwich put me over the edge. I had been hanging on by a thread all morning. I ate the two ounces of tuna, one piece of toast, one tablespoon of Nayo-naise, and lettuce that was supposed to be a satisfying lunch... twenty minutes later my stomach was grumbling and I was FREAKING STARVING.

To this day I will not eat tuna sandwiches.

The hunger was the worst. I could not believe I would survive on such a small amount of food. I was living meal to miserably small, unsatisfying, two-block meal. At some point each day for the first week I ended up on the couch crying. Maybe some part of me really thought I was going to die.

Day 2: CrossFit Santa Cruz: I told the Glassmans I was starving. They said, “You’re not hungry. It’s just a craving for the insulin response.” I argued, “No. I really am hungry; my stomach is grumbling twenty minutes after eating. I think I need more food... DON’T TELL ME I’M NOT HUNGRY!” To which Greg responded, “Eat two blocks of low-GI [glycemic index] veggies at your meals and then tell me you’re honestly hungry.”

I tried it. It helped. Broccoli became a truly beautiful thing in my life. Meals held me over longer. But socially I was useless. Every ounce of energy I had was going into just sticking with it. People would ask the daily nicety “How are you?” and all I wanted to say was, “I am on this stupid diet and it’s killing me.” And so it went for many days.

Day 13, CrossFit Santa Cruz: Fat Fran. I was using 65 pounds for the thrusters and it felt like 165. It sucked. Everything sucked. I would cry on warm-up runs, in the

bathroom after workouts, if someone looked at me weird. I cried A LOT. I was also craving fat like it was ice cream. More than anything I wanted to sit down with a jar of almond butter and a spoon.

I was clearly too lean. I was at 111lbs. from 115 and ripped. My performance times were down by minutes and I was an emotional wreck. Because I was somewhat lean to begin with Greg originally suggested I start the diet at 2 or 3x fat. I ignored him, thinking less fat would be better. I was stubborn, stupid and fat phobic. Now I was paying the price.

Day 14: I began to add more fat into my diet.

Day 21: I was eating five times the fat allotted in the standard Zone prescription, up from the original 15 grams to 75 grams per day. Once I made that change, it got much easier because the benefits came quickly. With the “crack” cravings quelled and little thought of wanting more food, I was now chasing results.

How did I make it to this point? What kept me going through the first brutal weeks? Most likely it was a combination of stubbornness, anger and curiosity. I was pissed that this moderate way of eating was kicking my ass. I thought it should not be this hard and that I should not give into my own weak will. Furthermore, around day 3, I was told that I was complaining too much to get a cheat day. Then I became doubly pissed. I decided I would show her, and do the freaking diet even if it killed me. Finally, I was intrigued. Clearly this was powerful stuff. I started to feel more confident that if I got over the hump and dialed it in properly, it would have a profound affect on me.

And indeed it did. I had never experienced so directly and consistently the practice of not giving up when it gets hard. Every time I entered my kitchen I had the opportunity to fail. It would have been so easy. But I didn’t, and I cannot describe emphatically enough the rewards—both physical and mental—that getting through that has brought to my life.

I went from not believing I could survive on the Zone to not believing how much I thrive on it. In just 4 weeks.

Try it.

