

## **ZONE DIET**

**Barry Sears, Ph.D.**

For generations, every male on my father's side of my family suffered from a similar fate: a premature heart attack that cut their life short decades too early. After my father died in 1972 at the age of 54, I realized that I had a genetic time bomb ticking away inside me. I knew I couldn't change my genes, but I was determined to find a way to lead a normal, healthy life span.

**As it turns out, the key to a longer, better life is a powerful hormone produced by your diet called insulin.** My research showed that if you were able to keep insulin levels within a certain zone – not too high and not too low – you could dramatically improve your health and prevent a wide range of diseases. You could also make your body start using fat for energy, thus allowing you to lose excess body fat without feeling hungry.

**Essentially, you need to start treating the Zone diet as a drug.** Make no mistake about it; food is a powerful drug. Consider your food like a medication: you have to take the right dose at the right time. Used correctly, food can make you more energized and healthier with the guarantee of a longer and more active life.

You are constantly reminded that a calorie is a calorie, and that weight gain is simply more calories coming in than calories going out. **On the hormonal level, all calories are not created equal.** The hormonal effect of a calorie of carbohydrate is different than the hormonal effect of a calorie of protein, and is still different from the hormonal effect of a calorie of fat. Each of these three nutrients has its own unique effects on your body's hormones. In the proper balance, these three nutrients are exactly what your body needs to remain healthy by keeping insulin within the Zone.

**The benefits of maintaining insulin in the Zone are almost immediate, because your blood sugar is also automatically stabilized.** As a result, you feel less hungry, less fatigued, you are more mentally alert and more energized throughout the day, because your brain is constantly being supplied with energy. You'll feel less cranky and moody between meals because you won't experience those sugar lows that make you tired, hungry, and irritable. Most important, you'll be doing everything in your power to keep yourself healthy and reduce the likelihood of developing such killers as heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

So how do you begin to regulate your insulin levels? **By eating the right combination of protein, carbohydrates and fat at EVERY meal and snack.** Make sure every meal and snack gets you to the Zone by eating the low-fat protein, the appropriate type carbohydrate and a little dash of "good" fat.

### **Basic Zone rules:**

1. Always eat a Zone meal within 1 HOUR after waking.
2. Try to eat 5 TIMES per day: three meals and two snacks.
3. Never let more than 5 HOURS go by without eating – regardless of whether you are hungry or not. In fact, the best time to eat is when you aren't hungry because that means you have stabilized your insulin levels. Afternoon and late evening snacks are important to keep you in the Zone throughout the day.

4. Eat more FRUITS and VEGETABLES as carbohydrates and ease off the bread, pasta, grains and other starches.
5. Drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of WATER every day. That's about a gallon of water.
6. If you make a mistake at a meal, don't worry about it. Just make your NEXT meal right to get you back where your hormones belong.

One reason why people are so confused about what to eat is that they often don't fully understand what they are eating. I often tell people, that “**protein moves around, and carbohydrates grow in the ground**”.

If you are using the “1-2-3” method to make Zone meals, then all you have to do is balance the number of GRAMS of fat, protein and carbohydrate at each meal. There is nothing forbidden to eat in the Zone, just as long as you maintain the right balance. However, some choices will be far better than others for maximum insulin stabilization.

**Best protein choices** - skinless chicken, turkey, fish, very lean cuts of meat, egg whites, low-fat dairy products, tofu, soy meat substitutes

**Favourable carbohydrates** (have a lower effect on insulin) – most vegetables (except corn and carrots), most fruits (except bananas and raisins), selected grains (oatmeal and barley)

**“Good” fats** (monounsaturated fats and long-chain omega-3 fats) – olive oil, almonds, avocados, fish oils

For the “palm-eye” method take a plate and divide it into 3 SECTIONS. On 1/3 of the plate put some low-fat protein that is no bigger or thicker than the palm of your hand. Then fill the other 2/3 of the plate until it is overflowing with fruits and vegetables. Then add a small amount of monounsaturated fat. And there you have it.

Now I'll show you why living in the Zone is controlled by the hormones and how those hormones are generated by the food you eat.

Protein, carbohydrates, and fats all have unique hormonal impacts. **Carbohydrates stimulate insulin, protein affects the hormone glucagon, and fats affect still another group of hormones called eicosanoids.**

Let's take insulin first. Insulin is a “storage hormone”. It tells the body to store incoming nutrients. Without adequate insulin, your cells starve to death and you die. On the other hand, too much insulin will make you fat, and accelerates the aging process.

**!!!** There are two ways of drive yourself out of the Zone. *The first is to eat too many carbohydrates at any one meal.* Carbohydrates are powerful stimulators of insulin secretion. *The other is to eat too many calories at any one meal.* Excess calories increase insulin levels because they must be stored somewhere in the body, and that demands more insulin. Furthermore, any excess calories the body cannot immediately store will be converted to fat and sent straight to your hips, stomach, or other problem areas for storage. **Unfortunately, the same high levels of insulin will also block the release of any stored body fat for energy.** This is why excess insulin makes you fat and keeps you fat.

Dietary protein stimulates the release of glucagon, which has the opposite hormonal effect of insulin. Glucagon is a “mobilization” hormone. It tells the body to release stored carbohydrate in the liver to replenish blood sugar levels for the brain. **Without**

**adequate levels of glucagon, you will always feel hungry and mentally fatigued because the brain is not getting enough of its primary fuel – blood sugar.**

Insulin and glucagon are constantly performing this balancing act. If one hormone goes up, then the other goes down. This is why the balance of protein to carbohydrate at every meal and snack is critical for maintaining insulin within the Zone.

Finally, there is fat. Fat has no direct effect on insulin. Nor does it have any effect on glucagon. So why not simply take all fatty out of the diet? The reason is that fat has an effect on another group of hormones called eicosanoids, and these hormones also help control the insulin levels. In many ways, eicosanoids are master hormones that orchestrate the functions of a vast array of other hormonal systems in your body. In a way, eicosanoids are analogous to a computer.

The Zone is about hormonal thinking, not caloric thinking.

**Everyone is not genetically the same.** About 75% of us have a relatively strong insulin response to carbohydrates, which means that our bodies make too much insulin if they over consume carbohydrates. Excess insulin production makes our blood sugar fall too quickly, which makes us tired, fatigued, and hungry for more carbohydrates.

The Zone diet is based on balance and moderation, science, and common sense. Much of the information can be found on my website, [www.drsears.com](http://www.drsears.com)  
Please read also about vitamins, supplements and the benefits of eating soy products.