

The Zone Diet



What it's about

In his series of books, Dr. Barry Sears writes that carbohydrates lead to high insulin levels, which in turn prevent the body from burning fat. This diet claims to have a balanced approach to nutrition by dividing meals into proportions of 40% carbohydrate, 30% protein and 30% fat. By following this diet, you're promised to enter the "zone", or the state at which your body is at its physical peak.

The cautions

The Glycemic Index (GI) is used to distinguish between different types of carbohydrates. The general idea is that low GI foods are better and can promote weight loss. This is too simplistic a concept for weight loss. For example, calorie-laden foods like chocolate cake and chocolate bars have a lower GI than a healthy bowl of oatmeal or slice of cantaloupe! Strict Zone diet followers may also find calcium lacking in their meals.

What most people don't realize is that the GI of a food also depends on *how* the food was processed, stored ripened, cut or cooked. Pasta, for example, is considered a low GI food, whether it's made from white or whole wheat flour. But thick cut linguine has a lower GI than thin cut linguine. Different types of rice too have different GI values. Instant white rice tends to be a higher GI food, whereas converted rice like Uncle Ben's has a low GI. Brown rice and long grain white rice fall somewhere in between.

The bottom line

The Zone diet is less of a no-carb diet and more of a "moderate carb" one. This diet is closer to the carb-fat-protein ratios that most dietitians and nutrition professionals would recommend in a healthy diet. However, strict reliance on the glycemic index (GI) of foods may be too simplistic an approach to weight loss. Focusing on whole grains (which tend to have lower GI values anyway), fruits, vegetables, lean meats and lower-fat dairy products is a sensible approach to a balanced diet.