
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Zero to 60

Intensity and movements are scalable. Jeff Barnett says you can apply the same concepts to nutrition.

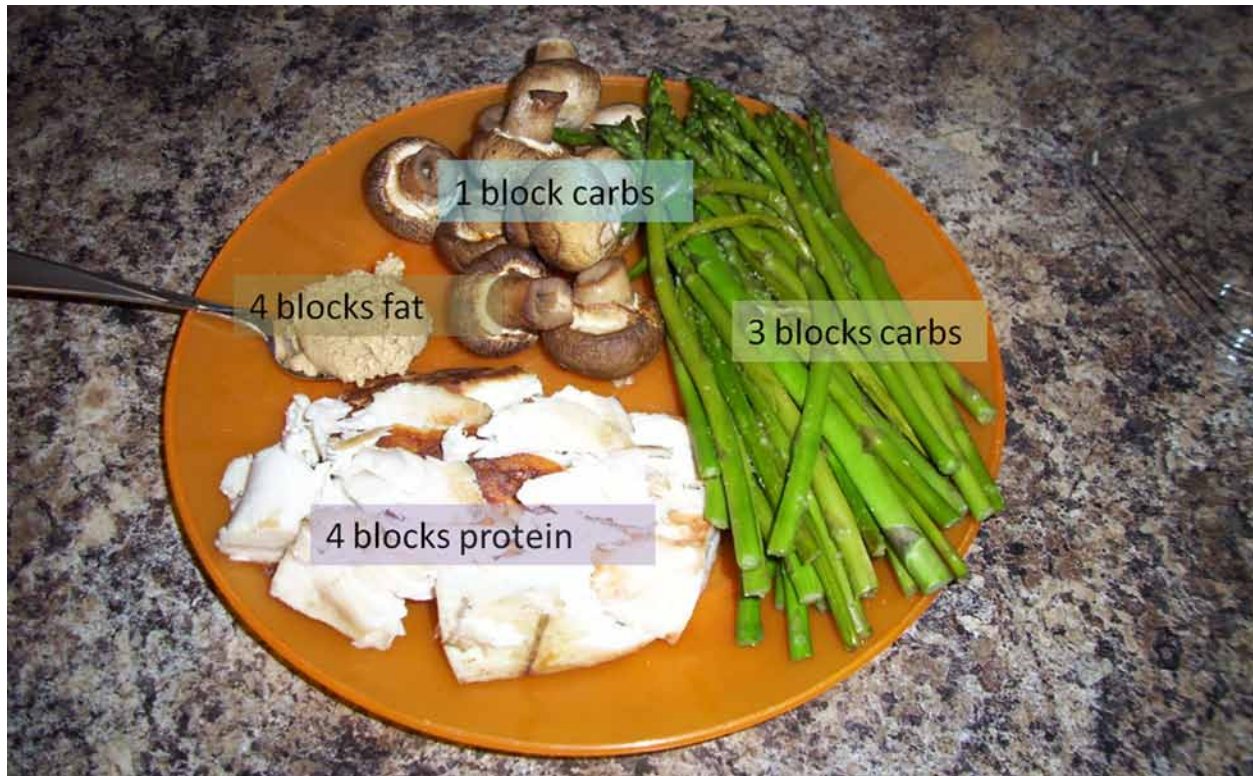
By Jeff Barnett CrossFit Impulse

September 2011



Jeff Barnett

Many athletes are not willing to endure a sudden change in nutrition. It's easy for me to say they should because I know the results they can eventually realize.



Christina Barnett

Notice that a nutritious meal contains a lot of vegetables.

However, anything a human has been doing for multiple decades is a tough habit to break. After all, I didn't go straight from Krystal to strict Zone/Paleo. I made a gradual transition as my knowledge of CrossFit grew. While it's not the best way to change for fastest results, this may actually be the most reasonable method to expect from the average athlete. After all, we teach that intensity is relative and you should gradually work up to full-intensity workouts. Making a sudden transition to a healthy diet can be just as daunting and difficult for some athletes.

Most people won't take the leap because they have no proof from their own experience. I now know from my experience that eating strict Zone/Paleo is so superior to downing chicken pot pie that I wouldn't want to make a gradual transition if I had to do it all over again. But if you lack that proof of experience, why should you believe it?

Some folks are convinced by persuasion, but some remain unconvinced, or the attraction of the average American diet is so strong that they can't quit the crack. Below, I've

outlined some individual steps that will help someone move toward a healthy, proportioned Zone/Paleo combination that would have Starr Jones washing clothes on her abs.

The duration spent on each step will vary with the individual. Each step could go very quickly or require multiple months of adjustment depending on your comfort level. You also might have no problem with one step, move past it in a week, and then stall out for months at the next step. Everyone hangs up on different things. As a general rule, give yourself at least one or two weeks at each step before you move on. Conversely, if you find yourself unwilling to move to the next step after one or two months, then it's probably time to check your motivation.

If you really believe proper nutrition is beneficial to your health and your life, then put on your big-girl panties and keep moving, even if it's a little uncomfortable. The process will never be totally comfortable until you get to the end, so accept that and keep marching forward.

Now let's take a look at just one of many, many acceptable ways to get you eating right.

Step 1: Breakfast, Protein, Dinner

Start eating breakfast. I don't care if you're not hungry in the morning or you hate eating breakfast. Start eating breakfast and that will change.

Start eating breakfast.

And breakfast must include some protein. Eat some meat with every meal—every single meal throughout your day. You can still forage on pasta and casseroles, but you've got to put some chicken in there.

Finally, eat a healthy dinner with meat and vegetables each night at home. It's just one meal, so suck it up and make that commitment to one healthy meal per day. And yes, I realize at this point a "healthy meal" probably means very different things to each of us, but just give it your best

shot with meat and vegetables. After all, this is about baby steps, so don't get wrapped around the axle. At this point, you can still have some dessert if you want.

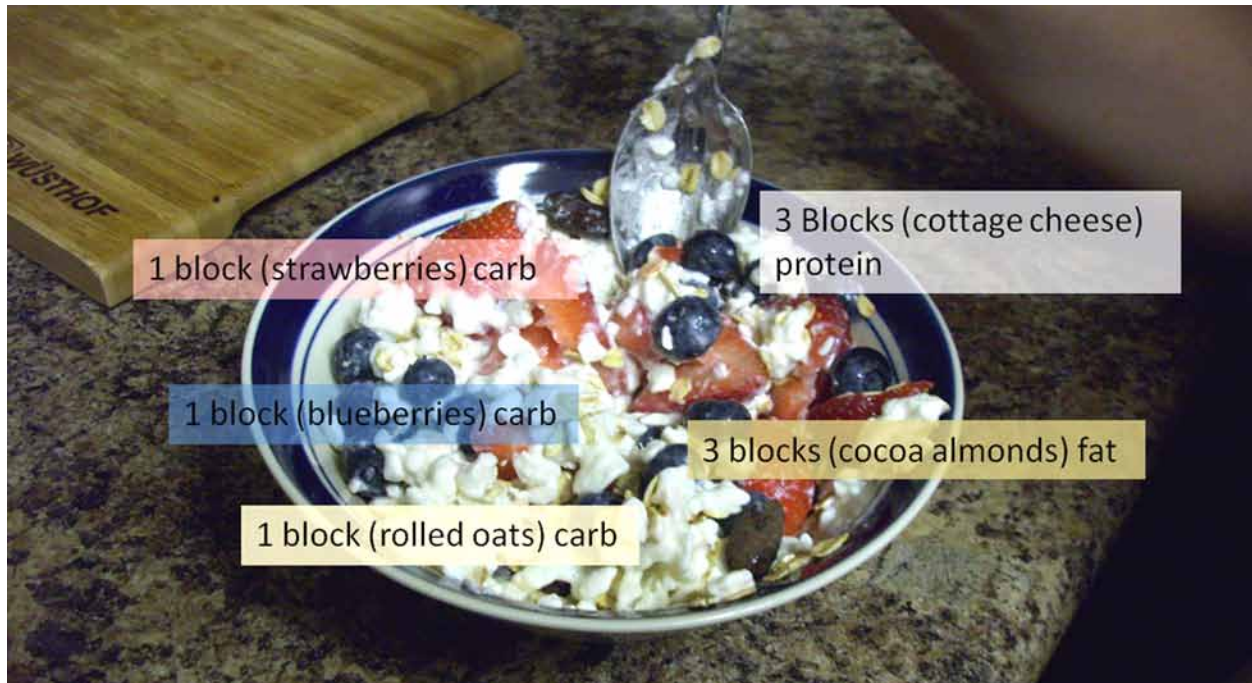
Step 2: Start Giving Up the Crap

Sorry, it had to start sometime.

Give up carbonated and sweetened drinks. You can give them up in stages if needed. Cut back to two a day, one a day, one every other day, and so on. Continue until you only drink water, coffee and unsweetened tea.

Stop grazing on stuff brought into the office. That's not for you anymore. You're choosing a different lifestyle that doesn't include sucking down anything anyone puts in front of you. You're going to be different. Your peers will start to notice. Get used to that idea.

At this point, you can still go out to lunch and eat whatever you want, but soda and its solid equivalent (candy bars, cookies and other sweets) are relegated to cheat days only. Oh, by the way, have a cheat meal once a week. This could even be a cheat day if your compliance is very good. However, I don't recommend a full cheat weekend. You can undo a lot of your five days of progress with two days of shoveling poop into your mouth.



Christina Barnett

Healthy meals can be delicious. Start collecting great recipes from others in the CrossFit community.

Step 3: Regiment Your Meals

Buy a small cooler/lunch box and start packing your lunch for work. You can still go out to lunch once, maybe twice per week, but your standard solution is the lunch you packed.

You now only eat your planned meals. Whatever your regimen turns out to be (e.g., breakfast, lunch, snack, dinner), then those are the only times you eat. You don't decide to buy an Almond Joy on a whim. It is not OK just because it has almonds.

Progress Report

Let's check in on our progress. By now you're eating protein with every meal. You're having a "healthy" dinner with meat and vegetables every night except your cheat meal. You've kicked sweets in the liquid and solid form. You're eating the same number of meals and general quantity of food each day. And you don't eat things just because someone brought them into the office. Some of this has probably been a little uncomfortable (giving up soda especially), but I bet you're doing fine. Now let's forge ahead and really start to make some progress.

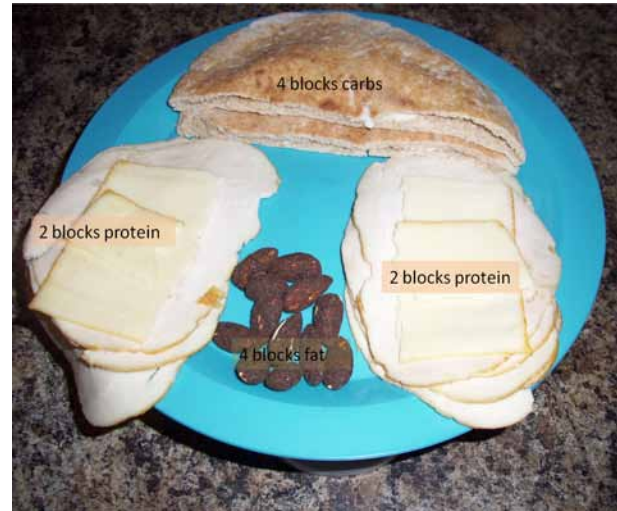
Buy a small cooler/lunch box and start packing your lunch for work.

Step 4: Get in the Zone and Say Goodbye to Bunny Bread

Buy a food scale. Yes, it costs \$20-25. Diabetes costs a lot more.

Read the CrossFit Impulse article [The Zone Diet Explained](#) and figure out your required blocks. Give this an honest effort. It may seem confusing at first, but if it's important to you, then you will keep asking questions until you understand.

From now on you will weigh and measure your food in Zone proportions. If 16 blocks per day is your Zone prescription, then you will eat exactly 16 blocks per day, and you will eat the correct proportion of protein and carbs at each meal.



The author says whole-oat pita bread can stay in your diet ... for now.

You're also giving up refined grains of every type: cereals, white bread, wheat bread, rice, corn—everything except pita bread. You can keep whole-oat pita bread if you just have to hang onto bread a little bit longer. This is difficult, but you can do it. Plenty of people have done it before you.

By now your acquaintances (not to be confused with your friends) should start to ridicule your food choices. This is a sign you are succeeding. If this is not happening, then you need to check your dedication. If your decisions don't make them feel uncomfortable, then you aren't making consistently good decisions.

Step 5: Strict Zone/Paleo

In addition to strict Zone proportions, you've now cut out all the remaining unfavorable foods from your diet. This includes breads of all types, grains of all types, pastas of all types, anything with significant sugar added like common yogurts, potatoes (excluding sweet potatoes), potato chips and all sweets.

Your acquaintances are beginning to suspect you have a six-pack, and it's true.

You no longer care how many blocks of carbs are in a white potato or pita pocket because you don't eat unfavorable carbs anymore. You probably eat the same lunch and snacks day in and day out, because you're starting to break the emotional connection to food. It's just fuel, not a source of happiness. You go to the grocery store multiple times per week, and you don't visit very many locations inside. The cashier knows you as the meat-fruit-and-vegetables lady. You check ingredients lists on everything you buy to ensure no soy or wheat products are lurking inside.

Your acquaintances are beginning to suspect you have a six-pack, and it's true. Ridicule moves to curiosity as they realize you are doing something right, but not before they try to sabotage you under the guise of "being a friend." They will likely try to talk you out of your "unhealthy" eating habits. This is probably after you've lost 10-20 lb. and become stronger and faster than ever. This is further evidence you are on the right track.

Step 6: Modifying Zone/Paleo to Your Specific Needs

You have arrived. You now know exactly how much food you eat every day and exactly how it's composed. You've adjusted your carb intake lower than Zone proportions, and your fat content has increased significantly to support your improved athletic performance. You might start systematically replacing fruit with vegetables except for post-workout meals.

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in your diet; you desire
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You don't desire variety in your diet; you desire performance. You happily eat the same stuff each week. You only eat snack bars if you'd otherwise fall into a coma. You'd rather be hungry than eat grains.

Your skeptical acquaintances don't ridicule you anymore because they know your method works. They also don't ask questions because they know they won't like the answers.

As Depeche Mode once said, "Enjoy the silence."



About the Author

Jeff Barnett is a mechanical engineer and co-owner of [CrossFit Impulse](#) in Madison, Ala. He served as a United States Marine officer from 2003 to 2007, including combat duty in Fallujah, Iraq. He has been a guest op-ed columnist for the [New York Times](#) on their [Frontlines](#) and [Homefires](#) columns. When he's not training clients or training himself, you might find him wakeboarding, eating meat off the bone or finishing an MBA at the University of Alabama Huntsville.