

# Help! My scale won't budge!

## Rainier CrossFit and weight loss

"I've been working my tail off but I haven't lost weight, what's going on?"

The short answer, a lot. You are building lean body mass rapidly the first 6 weeks or so, thus accounting for a few pounds of weight GAIN! The good news is that LBM is muscle, and muscle burns more calories than other tissues in the body. Your metabolism is picking up! The down side is that you may feel hungry or deserving of 'treats' for working so hard. The bottom line for weight loss is and has always been:

**Burn more calories than you take in and you will lose weight.**

It really is that simple, but not so easy. CrossFit workouts will burn calories, so will walking for an hour and taking the stairs. The goal of CrossFit is not to burn the maximum amount of calories, but to physically prepare a body for any activity it encounters. Many endurance athletes (and those suffering from anorexia!) are very thin. That might lead one to believe that long, slow, distance or endurance type activities are good for burning fat and for weight loss. True, but muscle tissue is often used as fuel during LSD and muscle wasting is not one of our goals. Endurance athletes undergo what we call a phase 3 adaptation meaning that extra muscle is detrimental to efficiency in long distance efforts, so the body tends to shed the extra muscle. That's why marathon runners have noodles for arms.

So if long, slow distance isn't the answer to fat burning, what is? Optimally, we wouldn't have "added the fat" to our bodies in the first place, but alas. So we turn to diet and attempt to weed through the mountains of information out there. CrossFitters have embraced the Zone Diet by Dr. Barry Sears ([www.drsears.com](http://www.drsears.com)) which emphasizes lean protein, good fats, and a balance of the right types of carbs at all meals and for all snacks. The presence of all 3 types of nutrients not only is more likely to satisfy our nutritional needs, but the presence of protein and fiber will slow the rate that the carbs leave the stomach, thus reducing the rise in blood sugar - more on this in a minute. The protein and the fat will also help us feel satisfied longer so we are less likely to indulge in that mid-day Snickers bar. Most importantly, the Zone reduces caloric intake and minimizes the bodies insulin response to food.

Huh? Insulin? And I thought we were talking weight loss. When we eat, all of our food is broken down into its 3 basic parts, proteins, fats and sugars (carbs). As the nutrients are absorbed into our bloodstreams from the small intestine,

the pancreas monitors the levels of sugar (glucose) in our blood. If the level of glucose is higher than the very narrow ideal range, between 70 and 110 milligrams of glucose in 100 milliliters of blood, the pancreas secretes insulin. Insulin allows all of our cells to absorb the extra sugar from our blood and use it as energy, as muscles do, or store it as fat, as adipose does. Diabetes occurs when there are problems with insulin and blood glucose levels remain elevated. For most of us, our insulin works just fine and we pack away the extra glucose as body fat, or energy to use at another time. But instead of needing to use that stored energy, we eat again and supply our bodies with excess fuel. And the cycle continues.

From [www.glycemicindex.com](http://www.glycemicindex.com) “The glycemic index (GI) is a ranking of carbohydrates on a scale from 0 to 100 according to the extent to which they raise blood sugar levels after eating. Foods with a high GI are those which are rapidly digested and absorbed and result in marked fluctuations in blood sugar levels. Low-GI foods, by virtue of their slow digestion and absorption, produce gradual rises in blood sugar and insulin levels, and have proven benefits for health. Low GI diets... have benefits for weight control because they help control appetite and delay hunger. Low GI diets also reduce insulin levels and insulin resistance.” For a list of foods and their GI score, see [www.southbeach-diet-plan.com/glycemicfoodchart.htm](http://www.southbeach-diet-plan.com/glycemicfoodchart.htm)

So the key to weight loss is using more calories than we eat. Proteins and carbohydrates have 4 calories per gram and fats have 9 calories per gram. We should stick with lean proteins, good fats, lots of vegetables in a variety of colors, and some fruits. From [www.crossfit.com](http://www.crossfit.com), “Eat meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, little starch and no sugar. Keep intake to levels that will support exercise but not body fat.” We should avoid refined or processed foods, ie. “anything white” and the partially hydrogenated oils, trans fats, carbs high on the GI scale, and sugar loaded products like colas.

The answers are as clear as mud regarding sugar substitutes. Although approved by the FDA, there are as many people and studies out there who ‘prove’ them unsafe as those who ‘prove’ them harmless. Used sparingly, most are much, much sweeter than table sugar, sucrose, so we use far less of them. Splenda isn’t absorbed by our bodies and it therefore has no affect on blood sugar. Much of the research I’ve found claims that sugar substitutes may help us maintain a weight loss, but it is changes in the primary diet that cause the weight loss.

Another discussion of interest is breakfast, which is critical to weight loss. Without breakfast, we can expect a mid morning drop in blood sugar and energy, followed by a cup of coffee and a sugary snack. Our brains cannot

store glucose like our muscles can, therefore, after an 8 to 9 hour fast, breakfast acts as a brain glucose replenisher, vital to our daily functioning. Eating at regular intervals is important because it helps keep one's metabolic rate up. If a person goes for prolonged periods without eating, the body conserves energy, expends fewer calories, and sets us up for overeating at our next meal. A food journal is a good idea, if you write down every bite you eat then you not only will have a realistic view of your food intake, but may make better choices because of the inherent accountability.

So how do I know if I'm losing weight if my scale doesn't change? The best indicator is body composition which isn't very user friendly. A better method for us would be body measurement. About once per month, measure around the widest parts of your calves, thighs, hips, stomach, chest, and upper arms. Keep track in a notebook. Be sure not to measure too often as change happens slowly. Another great indicator is clothes...how are they fitting? Do those jeans zip easier now? The toughest part of this is figuring out how we are to be athletes with strong, capable bodies but still fit the image of the perfectly skinny, airbrushed swim suit model.