

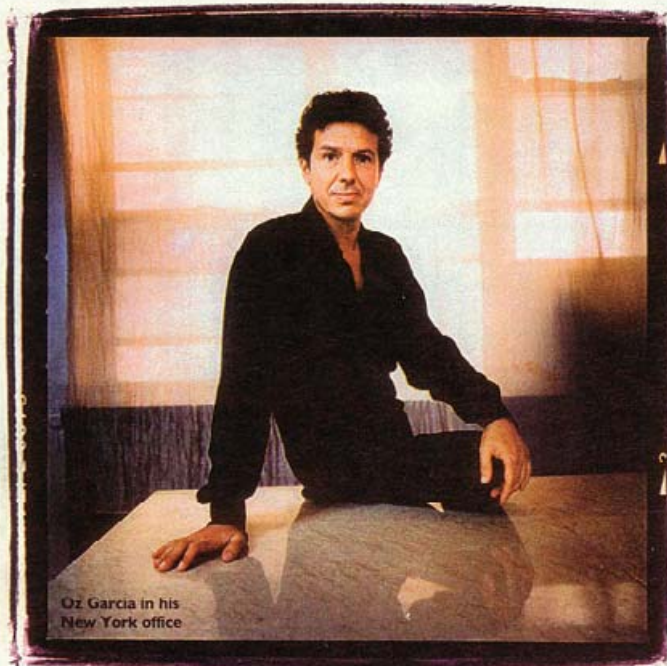
Burning Issue

In his new book, nutrition guru Oz Garcia strikes a blow for the "balanced" metabolism.

PHOTO BY STEFFEN THALEMANN

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Metabolism, declares Oz Garcia, isn't destiny. That may come as a shock to legions of weight-obsessed women who long to be "fast burners" or those who feel condemned to being "slow burners." But in the land of Oz, such knee-jerk reactions are torched on a daily basis. You can have a warp-speed metabolism and still be packing a few, says the New York-based nutrition guru. Likewise, there are loads of skinny minnies who can barely haul their backsides out of bed every morning.



Oz Garcia in his New York office

In other words, says the self-styled health expert with the glittering client roster, there is plenty we can do to set ourselves on the road to wellville. And Garcia's hoping that the first such step in that direction is the purchase of his new book: *The Balance—A Customized Food and Supplement Guidebook to Achieve Supermetabolism and Maximum Health*.

A fairly breezy read considering the clunker of a title, the book underscores Garcia's major premise of "metabolic individuality." The problem with most diets, he says (not to mention the recently rerigged governmental nutritional guidelines), is that they aren't even remotely customized enough to be useful over the long haul. Age, gender—even a woman's monthly cycle—are all factors that should be taken into consideration.

"There are all sorts of criteria that start to come into the picture that will



Oz Garcia clients Yasmeen Ghauri and...



Charlotte Ford



Veronica Webb

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define different needs," says Garcia, taking a break between clients at his Upper West Side nutritional counseling practice. "What's right for you may not be right for me. You may require many fewer calories in a day than I do."

For Garcia's clients, a battery of tests, including bloodwork and the all-important "hair biopsy," helps him assess an individual's nutritional strengths and weaknesses. Readers of *The Balance*, who obviously don't have direct access to Garcia, can draw similar conclusions through an in-depth questionnaire.

The 50 questions are designed to determine whether one is a fast, slow or mixed "burner," and run the gamut from food preferences ("I would be more likely to crave...") to energy levels ("I'm awake and alert...") to emotional makeup ("I tend to get angry..."). A few seem to come from left field ("When I hear an unexpected noise, I..."), but are nonetheless helpful in obtaining a clearer metabolic picture.

Each category of burner has its own set of traits, both physical and psychological, as well as advantages and drawbacks. (Garcia cautions, however, that much of what he attributes to each type is of a general nature and shouldn't be regarded as the whole truth and nothing but the truth.)

Fast burners, who, according to Garcia represent 20 percent of the population, have a tendency to release energy too quickly for their own good. Although it "feels better to be in fast oxidation because of the high energy released," mineral reserves are compromised.

Often a hard-driving "Type A" personality, the fast burner frequently has difficulty concentrating and is prone to both addiction and anxiety, as well as ailments ranging from bronchitis and conjunctivitis to anemia and ulcers. The upside? They're big exercisers.

"One generalization that cannot be made, however, is that all fast burners are lean and mean," Garcia writes. "Although it would seem that burning all that energy would keep you trim, it often has the opposite effect." That's due to an overactive



Chynna Phillips



Winona Ryder

adrenal gland, which causes a spike in inflammation, water retention and higher levels of sugar in the blood, all of which contribute to greater amounts of stored fat.

The bulk of the American population—no surprise here—falls into the slow-burning camp. On the plus side, they're usually calm, cool and emotionally stable. On the minus side, they tend to tire easily after the slightest exertion, and are prone to allergies, asthma, hypoglycemia or other byproducts of excess insulin production.

Ironically, although they fall asleep easily, slow burners have a tendency toward the type of insomnia that causes them to awaken several times a night. "You need energy to reach the REM stage of sleep," Garcia writes. "If you don't reach that stage, you will not be fully rested and will feel chronically fatigued."

The last group—mixed burners—accounts for a paltry 10 percent of the population, says Garcia. This lucky bunch neither burns its "fuel" too fast nor too slow, and therefore has a greater range of options in food choices than its fast-burning and slow-burning cousins. Physically, mixed burners enjoy excellent health save the occasional cold or

bout of stomach upset. Psychologically, they're right in the middle—fairly ambitious, but not especially fond of freaking out.

The challenge for the mixed burner, says Garcia, is maintaining the status quo. "The downside of being a mixed burner is that the balance you have is a precarious one," he writes. "You can easily slide off in either direction."

But with the myriad food recommendations and menus contained in *The Balance*, Garcia has gone to great lengths to prevent that from happening. For each category of burner, he lists specific types of proteins (both animal and vegetarian), fruits and vegetables, fats and oils and carbohydrates he feels are most appropriate. There is also a massive chapter on supplements, his area of expertise and particular interest.

While additional vitamins and minerals are, of course, optional, Garcia considers supplementation to be nearly as important to overall health as a sound diet. And basically, he feels people are batty not to take advantage of what he feels are major scientific leaps in recent years.

"Food is central," he says. "But given the times we live in, and the advances in understanding how supplements work and what they do, there is so much you can do to perform better, feel better and undo a lot of damage."

The goal, he says, is to continue tinkering with diet, exercise and supplements until one arrives at his or her own optimal health scenario.

"There is trial and error," he says. "But the average individual can produce phenomenal results pretty quickly. They begin to make certain changes and they're aware that they feel much better. And then three or four months go by, they've made more changes. And they can't believe they ever functioned any other way."

—DANA WOOD

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New York's Diet Guru