



Nutrition Nibbles

San Jose Registered Dietitian Nutritionists Weigh In on the Paleo Diet

This month's article is written by Maureen Bligh, MA,RDN, of the Dairy Council of California. Maureen and I are part of a local group of dietitians who get together regularly to discuss the latest nutrition books—both credible and incredible. Here are our conclusions about the Paleo Diet craze. Her original blog post can be found [here](#).

Our book club meets about four times a year to discuss popular books on food and nutrition. This past month we met to discuss "The Paleo Diet" by Loren Cordain, Ph.D. While the book is a current New York Times bestseller, variations of this dietary concept have been around since at least 1975. The aim of the diet is to improve healthy eating by adopting the habits of the people of the Paleolithic period—about 10,000 years ago—before the agriculture and industrial revolutions.

The premise behind the diet is that our bodies are not biologically made for an agriculturally-based diet since modern humans have not genetically adapted to consume industrial-era foods. Recommended foods must be ones that can be hunted, fished or gathered. Therefore, according to the Paleo diet, you can eat fish, grass-fed, pasture-raised meats, eggs, vegetables, fruit, fungi, roots and nuts. The diet excludes

grains, legumes (beans and peanuts), dairy products, potatoes, refined salt, refined sugar and processed oils. The diet claims to improve health and longevity.

WHERE WE AGREE

- **E**at fewer sweets and salty snacks. All eating patterns that include fewer sweets and salty snacks benefit health since these foods are high in calories and low in nutrients.
- **E**at minimally processed foods. Eating food in the most natural state, a raw apple versus applesauce, provides more nutrients and fiber than a highly processed variation of the food.
- **F**or some people eating more protein and less carbohydrate helps with weight loss and satiety.

HOLES IN THE PALEO ARGUMENT

We were all skeptical of the basis of the diet. Where is the proof that this diet is superior? Do we know that the prehistoric humans were healthier than we are now? We know for sure that they didn't live as long as we do; infectious disease and accidents shortened lives so most did not live long enough to develop chronic diseases. Also, it is an incorrect assertion that we are biologically identical to our

College Corner: **GET PREPPIN'**

Do you ever wish you had someone to grocery shop and cook for you? When you lived at home, that person's name was most likely "mom" or "dad" but now that you're on your own, those responsibilities fall on your shoulders. But I'm here to tell you that it doesn't always have to!

Over the past few months, I have been part of a "Meal Prep Group." Several of us get together to prepare 3 to 5 meals for the week. Usually, we all pick a recipe we'd like to try, one person does all the grocery shopping, and another person provides the kitchen. We spend a few hours chopping, dicing, slicing, and catching up. We have a great time and a week's worth of dinners are ready to go. All we each have to do is go home and cook them up.

Why don't you start your own meal prep group? Enjoy the fun times and good eats that come about as a result!



Italian Grain Stew

Questions or Comments? Email me at marymahoneyrd@gmail.com

Paleo Diet cont...

Paleolithic ancestors. Most people have adapted to be able to tolerate and enjoy grains (less than 1% of Americans are diagnosed with celiac disease¹ and gluten sensitivity is estimated to be about 5-6%²) and dairy (only about 12% of American's have self-reported lactose intolerance and many of these people can enjoy some types of dairy foods³). And why it recommends avoiding beans and peanuts we could not fathom.

Even if you wanted to eat exactly what our ancestors ate, we do not have access to the same foods. The foods available 10,000 years ago are drastically different than what is available today. Here is an interesting [TED talk](#) by Christina Warinner, an archaeological scientist, who describes what the ancient food was actually like and why we can't purchase them even at the local farmer's market.

IS THERE ANY EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE PALEO DIET?

Actually yes, there are a few studies that show you can lower blood sugar and reduce body weight when following the Paleo diet. Our book club also reflected on the fact that you get the same results on a vegan diet. Perhaps the common denominator for these highly restrictive diets is that they reduce food choices so you eat less. That alone would lower blood sugar and body weight.

WHAT THE BOOK DOES NOT ANSWER:

- **W**hat are the long-term unintended consequences of eating such a high fat, high protein diet that is low in calcium and whole grains on health?
- **D**oes the Paleo diet increase the risk of osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease?

These types of studies have not been done.

SUSTAINABILITY

If the reader followed the Paleo diet as written, they would be eating many fiber-rich vegetables, wild-caught fish and venison. However, many people use Paleo as an excuse to eat hamburgers or other processed meats which are not recommended on the Paleo diet.

Any diet that excludes one or more food groups is difficult for many people to follow. And the more food categories excluded, the more people are likely to give up on the diet.

Finally, cutting out food groups also makes for nutritionally unbalanced eating. Excluding dairy reduces calcium and vitamin D intake (milk and milk products contribute 51% of the calcium and 58% of vitamin D in the American diet⁴); omitting grains reduces fiber and B vitamins and by avoiding legumes you would miss out on a low cost form of protein, vitamins and fiber. Healthy eating should include a wide variety of foods from all five food groups for balanced nutrition.

WANT MORE INFORMATION ON THE PALEO DIET?

Here are some good sources:

- http://marcird.com/_blog/blog/post/paleo-diet-debunked
- <http://blog.itriagehealth.com/paleo-diet-healthy-2/>
- http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/the-truth-about-gluten-free-paleo-and-other-diet-books/2013/08/05/2aeb5874-eef9-11e2-bed3-b9b6fe264871_story.html
- <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=why-paleo-diet-half-baked-how-hunter-gatherer-really-eat>

For the author's full bio, click on [Maureen Bligh, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist](#).

REFERENCES:

- 1 PubMed, The Prevalence of Celiac Disease in the United States
- 2 Web MD Gluten Sensitivity: Fact or Fad
- 3 Lactose Intolerance: Can Dairy Be Part of the Solution?
- 4 Milk + Dairy: The Forgotten Food Group

A special thank you to Jocelyn Fry, our summer intern, who helped compile references used in this blog.