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***Is a Paleolithic diet beneficial or detrimental for humans today?***

***Paleo vs Modern Diets - Key Differences* by** [**Laura Dolson**](http://lowcarbdiets.about.com/bio/Laura-Dolson-17379.htm)

### How do Eating Patterns and Nutrition Vary between Paleolithic and Modern Times?

There are a number of major differences between our diets and those of the "cavemen."

Writers espousing Paleolithic diets point to evidence regarding both prehistoric people and more recent hunter-gatherer populations that agriculture increased chronic diseases such as heart disease in these populations.

### Types of foods

Early on, before fire was controlled, only food which could be eaten raw was consumed. This ruled out grains, legumes, and some tubers such as potatoes. Even when early people started to use fire to cook food, they were mainly limited to roasting or toasting it. Besides meat, a few roasted nuts or grains by the fire were pretty much it. Additionally, before animals were domesticated (around 5,000 to 6,000 years ago) milk and dairy products were not consumed. Obviously, any refined sugars other than occasional honey, or any processed foods, were totally out.

What exactly was eaten by early people clearly varied according to geography, but most of the diets are thought to be at least half animal foods (including insects), and many up to 70 percent food of animal origin. Gathering enough plant food to support highly active people simply wouldn't have been feasible in most places.

Despite this, large amounts of vegetation were consumed; some estimates are that in many areas early humans ate up to 6 pounds of greens per day. This is a lot of greens -- about a grocery-bag full, but this produces only about 400 to 700 calories. However, the nutrient load of those greens is huge, producing many times the minimum daily requirement of most vitamins and minerals. Of course, other parts of plants were eaten, including nuts and fruit, though we probably couldn't recognize the ancestors of the sugary fruit we eat today.

### Antinutrients

Writers about Paleolithic diets often talk about substances in grains, legumes, and some other foods which can interfere with absorption of nutrients, such as phytic acid. Other molecules, such as lectins, are said to contribute to a situation in the gut where the intestines let larger molecules pass into the blood, possibly contributing to allergies and autoimmune conditions. This condition is called "leaky gut," or "increased intestinal permeability."

**ABC Nightline Video**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XeFlKPUYplM>

**The Paleo Diet Is a Nutritional Nightmare**  ***By: John McDougall***

By nature, the Paleo Diet is based on artery-clogging saturated fats and cholesterol, and bone-damaging, acidic proteins from animal foods. Respected researchers find that those modern-day hunter-gather populations who base their diets on meat, such as the Inuits (Eskimos), suffer from [heart disease and other forms of atherosclerosis](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16997359), and those modern-day hunter-gathers who base their diets on plant foods (starches) are free of these diseases. [Osteoporosis](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/4412233), from their high animal food-based diets, is also epidemic among meat and fish consuming hunter-gathers, specifically the Inuits.

In an attempt to defend eating animals, Paleo teachers believe the harmful nutrients from these foods are counteracted by the addition of non-starchy fruits and vegetables, and nuts and seeds.

Furthermore, according to Dr. Cordain, a diet very high in animal protein foods would cause a person to become seriously ill with nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and eventually death from protein toxicity. For most people the dietary ceiling for protein is 200 to 300 grams a day or about 30 to 40 percent of the normal daily calorie intake. The Paleo Diet is as high as 35% protein. Contradicting his warnings, Dr. Cordain consistently and frequently emphasizes that “Protein is the dieter’s friend.”  
   
Eating animal-derived foods causes our most common diseases for many well-established reasons, including the indisputable facts that they contain no dietary fiber, are filthy with disease-causing microbes (including mad cow prions, and E. coli and salmonella bacteria), and contain the highest levels of poisonous environmental chemicals found in the food chain. Remember, disease-causing red meats, poultry, fish, and eggs make up 55% of the Paleo Diet.

The [June 21, 2012 issue of the *British Medical Journal*](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22718914) presented the latest updates on the long-term health hazards of low-carbohydrate, high-protein diets, and reported that, “In particular, women had a 5% higher incidence of cardiovascular disease (heart disease) for each tenth of an increase in the low carbohydrate-high protein score, yielding a 62% higher incidence among women in the highest categories of low carbohydrate-high protein diets compared with the lowest.” These low-carb diets, from Atkins to Paleo, are simply dangerous.

**Civilizations Could Not Have Thrived on the Paleo Diet**

According to Dr. Cordain, “The Agriculture Revolution changed the world and allowed civilizations—cities, culture, technological and medical achievements, and scientific knowledge—to develop.” In other words, if people had remained on a diet of mostly animal foods (assuming our ancestors actually did), we would still be living in the Stone Age. Fortunately, the Agriculture Revolution, with the efficient production of grains, legumes, and potatoes—the very foods forbidden by the Paleo Diet—allowed us to become civilized.

Dr. Cordain finishes his 2011 revision of his national best-selling book *The Paleo Diet* by warning, “Without them (starches, like wheat, rice, corn, and potatoes), the world could probably support one-tenth or less of our present population…” Choose 10 close friends and family members. Which nine should die so that the Paleo people can have their uncivilized way?*.*

**Debunking the Paleo Diet** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMOjVYgYaG8>

***The Caveman Diet: Experts' Views***

“People who eat diets high in whole grains, beans, and low-fat dairy tend to be healthier because these foods are nutrient-rich and there are mountains of research about the health benefits of diets that include, not exclude, these foods,” says Keith Ayoob, EDd, RD, an assistant professor at New York's Albert Einstien School of Medicine.

American Dietetic Association spokeswoman Heather Mangieri, MS, RD, says, "This Paleo diet has some great aspects, but the limitations make it another diet that people go on but can’t sustain for a number of reasons, including a lack of variety, [cost], and potential nutrient inadequacies" due to the elimination of certain food groups.

**The Caveman Diet: Food for Thought**

A diet that includes whole, unprocessed foods is the basis of most all healthy diet recommendations. But so are whole grains, low-fat dairy, and legumes.

Including these food groups will help meet nutritional needs and contribute to a well-balanced diet plan. You can satisfy dietary requirements without these foods, but that requires careful planning and supplementation. If the Paleo or Caveman diet appeals to you, be sure to supplement the plan with [calcium](http://www.webmd.com/vitamins-supplements/ingredientmono-781-calcium.aspx?activeingredientid=781&activeingredientname=calcium) and [vitamin D](http://www.webmd.com/vitamins-supplements/ingredientmono-929-vitamin+d.aspx?activeingredientid=929&activeingredientname=vitamin+d). Eliminating all grains, dairy, processed foods, sugar, and more will most likely lead to weight loss. But it may be tough to follow this plan long-term due to the diet's strict nature.

Pros and Cons of the Paleo Diet By [*Leslie Bonci, RD, MPH, LDN, Director of Sports Nutrition*](http://www.upmc.com/media/experts/Pages/leslie-j-bonci.aspx)

**General Observations**

1. The diet does not specify portions of the allowed foods, and because there aren’t a ton of approved foods, you may find yourself overeating some of them. This wouldn’t be a calorie issue if you ate a lot of lettuce, but could be a problem if you ate a 5-pound jar of nuts.
2. The diet is higher in protein, which is an important nutrient to build and maintain muscle. But too much protein usually means too little carbohydrate, which is the energy source for exercise.
3. The amount of carbohydrate may be inadequate for athletes. The diet does allow some carbohydrates, but it is still fairly restrictive.

**Benefits**

* You will eat a **clean** diet without additives, preservatives, or chemicals.
* You do get the anti-inflammatory benefit from the plant nutrients in fruits, vegetables, oils, nuts, and seeds.
* You will be eating more iron through increased red meat intake.
* You will have improved satiety — a feeling of fullness between meals, due to the higher intake of protein and fats.
* Most people will lose weight primarily due to the limited food choices.

**Risks/Disadvantages**

* This eating plan can be very pricey.
* You don’t eat any grains, whole or otherwise, which are good for health and energy.
* Consuming no dairy foods is not great for your bones.
* If you take away foods and nutrients and don’t find suitable replacements, you can create a nutrient imbalance.
* This diet can be really hard for vegetarians, especially since the diet excludes beans.
* Most athletes need between 3 to 6 grams of carbs per pound of their body weight, per day. This would be very hard to do with just fruits and vegetables.

**Food Pyramids (Google Images)**

*Paleo Food Pyramid*

*Modern Food Pyramid*

