

Mark Hyman, MD

What is your opinion of the whole Paleo-vegan debate?

I think fanaticism is a source of disease. If you look at the science dispassionately there is a lot of evidence for both sides, a Paleo diet and a vegan diet are not mutually exclusive.

Eating a Paleo diet does not mean eating mostly meat; it means eating a large number of plant foods, including vegetables, tubers, seeds, and nuts. The meat our ancestors ate was basically wild animals. The meat is very lean and rich in omega-3s. There is little comparison between wild game and the bulk of meat eaten today, which is beef. For instance, the effect on inflammatory markers of lean meat from game animals versus beef is completely different. The first is anti-inflammatory; the second is pro-inflammatory.

So, the ultimate question is what veggies and what meat? The argument should really be made that we are adapted to a diet high in fiber, phytonutrients, and antioxidant. Reaching an optimal diet can be achieved in several ways. People who live in India eat a diet that is 80 percent of a plant based. On the other hand, Inuits eat a diet that is 80 percent animal fat. Both are fine.

It's time to focus on the broader discussion...people shouldn't be eating industrialized foods—period. If you choose to eat meat, you should be wary of where it comes from, what it's fed, how it's raised. For the average American, animal protein is a real problem. For the country and the globe, animal feedlots are a real problem. I think that's the bigger issue.

People have fanatical beliefs about diet, but the truth is that you can be healthy on a multitude of diets. If you look at the research, you can argue both sides, but are saying the same thing. I think we are over-arguing the issue instead of looking at our commonalities, which means that we are missing the real issue. The real issue is that we need to be off our of industrialized diet.

By Paleo diet if you mean bacon, sausage, steak and cream...that's dangerous. I think the argument of no grains is interesting and has some merit. If you go with traditional grains, such as buckwheat, quinoa, and millet, that have been around for 10,000 years you're better off. But gluten-containing refined grains can be problematic.

How can a Paleo diet be done well? How can it be done poorly?

If a Paleo diet is primarily meat-based, then you can't separate it from the evidence that an animal-based diet is has major environmental consequences. As it stands, 70 percent of the world's agricultural land is used in the production of livestock for human consumptions. What's more is that 30 percent of the Earth's surface is used to raise animals for human consumption. This is undoubtedly contributing to the wholesale

depletion in soil minerals as well as natural aquifers. By relying on meat we are doing the world a real disservice. Downsize your meat. If we reduced our meat consumption to once or twice a week, you'll be healthier and the planet will be healthier.

How can a vegan diet be done well? How can it be done poorly?

Coco-cola and potato chips are a vegan diet. It's important to understand the complexity of doing that well requires a fair bit of intelligence to get a healthy amount of proteins, nuts, seeds, etc...everyone is different. I think it depends on what you're doing...if all you're eating is fruit and grains you're going to get diabetes.

If everybody is fighting with each other about what kind of foods we should be eating, we are missing the bigger picture of how industrialized foods are destroying the Earth.