

Paleo Questions:

- What is a Paleo diet and how does it differ from a mainstream conventional diet?

This is a good question, as it can be many things. I think the best overall definition of a Paleo diet is that it is a way of eating that is based on the types of foods that would have been available to humans for the vast majority of our evolutionary history. The reasoning recognizes that the selective pressures and foods that would have been available during this time (99.99% of human evolutionary history) would have had a profound influence upon our physiological makeup and the vast majority of our nutritional requirements now. The bottom line is that we ALL evolved as (and are genetically nearly 100% identical to) hunter-gatherers, regardless of our ethnicity and regardless of our ideologies. This means a decided emphasis on animal based foods, naturally occurring fat and some fibrous plant based foods (together with some small amount of fruit) as climatically and seasonally available. Many primitive peoples cultured and fermented certain foods and these have their healthful place on the "Paleo menu", as well. I believe these principles and dietary inclusions must be a starting place for anyone seeking to optimize their health. From this starting place other science-derived principles may be applied to better refine the dietary approach and optimize outcomes (as explored in my book, *Primal Body, Primal Mind*), but "Paleo" is really undeniably foundational for us all.

- What is a typical Paleo breakfast, lunch and dinner for you?

Breakfast for me might consists of a duck egg cooked in tallow or ghee or a small dish of homemade coconut yogurt. Lunch might consist of a vegetable salad with a small amount of sliced meat or fish, plus maybe some avocado and enough olive oil in the dressing to provide satiation. Dinner might be some modest portion of meat or fish with lots of steamed veggies covered in ghee and garlic and maybe a few extra greens on the side. I often also include a spoonful or two of cultured vegetables for their nutritionally excellent enzymatic and probiotic value. Snacks might typically include nuts or a spoonful of nut butter, raw veggies, seaweed snacks, a green drink or a nibble of grass-fed homemade jerky. Percentage-wise I personally derive easily 70% + of my **caloric** intake from a wide variety of natural fats. The rest mostly comes from protein, though for me it is only a moderate amount--maybe only 6 or 7 ounces in a day. I eat a large amount and variety of fibrous vegetables and greens--mostly for their phytonutrient and antioxidant value, but these are typically quite comparatively low in caloric value. I eat almost no sugar or starch at all, save a few wild blueberries and other berries from time to time for their unique anthocyanin and flavonoid content. Most other fruit is only a very occasional thing for me.

- Why did you choose to eat this way? Can you touch on what you see as the key benefits (nutritional, ethical, aesthetic, etc.) of Paleo eating?

Getting here has been a real process through trial and error, uncovering new clinical information, including longevity research advances and modifying that for my own unique health needs and the needs of my clients. Initially I chose this way of eating because it appealed to me in a very foundational sort of way and resonated with my own sense of what is most natural and supportive of optimal health. I think the adventure of it as well as the common sense inherent in this way of eating also appealed to me. I stuck with it because it truly enhanced the quality of my health and well being in a fully sustainable

manner. I've never looked back. The impact I have seen of this way of eating on my own clients has been consistently and dramatically transformative.

The way I see it few of us have any room for error in this world anymore. We are all simply too challenged by a compromised environment, stress, water and food supply (not to mention economic conditions) to risk our health through empty indulgences or wishful thinking. Also, the fact is that I truly love eating the way I do--functioning as a conscious part of the cycle of life, in integrity with my highest values and the manner in which my body was fully designed to eat.

- What appeals to you most about this way of eating?

It is physiologically sustainable (in other words, it optimally supports all aspects of my physiological functioning). It is also quite energizing in an additionally sustainable way, utterly delicious and satisfying. Using natural dietary fat as a dominant percentage of my caloric intake also frees me from a constant preoccupation with where my next meal is coming from and liberates me from the considerable limits of blood sugar dependent issues. It is very freeing on many levels...and it is also very economical. I have also never felt better in all of my life. It almost feels a though I am aging in reverse.

- What do you think is generally misunderstood about the Paleo approach to eating?

That it is all about mindlessly gorging endlessly on meat with little or no vegetables (I actually eat more vegetables than most vegetarians), with no regard to the welfare of animals or the planet.

The idea of meat eating being necessarily destructive to the environment is absurd (unless we're talking about feedlot farming, which I would never advocate). The planet is filled with plentiful non-agricultural grassland that can be used for sustainably raising livestock. In fact, Alan Savory of the Savory Institute (www.savoryinstitute.com) is advancing something called "Holistic Management" where grass-feeding of animals is being effectively applied to dramatically transforming the environment. The Institute's own web site mission states: *"The Institute's Consulting and Training activities are turning deserts into thriving grasslands, restoring biodiversity, bringing streams, rivers and water sources back to life, combating poverty and hunger, and increasing sustainable food production, all while putting an end to global climate change."*

I personally have worked on behalf of animals for a good part of my life, am deeply passionate about suffering and am very much an environmental advocate. I see nothing in any part of the way I eat that is incompatible with any of it. There is a cycle of life (and death) of which we all are a part and my way of eating honors that as it is fully natural. Our modern way of life has disconnected us from this awareness and leads some to cast moral judgment on fulfilling our natural role in this way. There is a deeply spiritual foundation in this way of life for me. That said, I think it is imperative that we all (Paleo, Vegetarian and Vegan advocates alike) work together toward the common ground we all aspire to--in which we are much more alike than unlike: the desire for a clean environment where nourishing food may be sustainably and ethically grown and raised without contaminants, pesticides/herbicides, genetic modification, cruelty, or damage to the environment. Imagine what could be accomplished if we put our differences aside and combined our passions toward these goals! We would literally transform the world.

- What is your opinion of a vegan diet? What do you see as the potential pros and cons?

The potential pros, at least where raw food veganism is concerned is the effect of a very cleansing diet--Wonderful for "detoxing" in the short term, lowering insulin and mTOR levels (as I outline in my book) and giving the body a rest from excess digestive burden. That said, we lack the four stomachs, rumen and/or bacterially based digestive process of an herbivore to derive full or sufficient nutritional and caloric benefit from solely plant-based foods long term. It is a path toward diminishing health returns.

Many minerals in the human diet require ionization in the gut via hydrochloric acid in order to be properly absorbed and deficiencies in a vegan diet are inevitable (just because a certain mineral might be in a plant doesn't mean you can necessarily absorb it--particularly if it is bound by cellulose, phytates or oxalates). And even if one can "combine" different plant foods in a way every meal as to create a complete protein source, "complete" in no way implies protein sufficiency. Higher density vegan protein sources such as soy come with a wealth of risks and negative health effects too numerous to list here and soy foods tend to be highly processed, hormonally disruptive, mineral depleting, protease inhibiting and are overwhelmingly very genetically modified. Elongated EFA sources (EPA/DHA) and other healthy natural fats essential to stable neurological function are dangerously lacking in such a diet (and flax oil is NOT the same thing, nor does it convert to anywhere near enough of the same thing). Vegan diets also lack many other critical nutrients essential to the functioning of the body and especially brain (not the least of which include usable forms of B12 and certain animal source fat-soluble nutrients) and nutrient deficiencies and their effects are ultimately inevitable...some of which may even be irreversible. Furthermore, a post-agriculturally based diet is inevitably quite antigenic (gluten, lectins and other more common sources of food sensitivities). I have noticed an increased prevalence of autoimmune issues with vegetarian and vegan individuals. Interestingly, many autoimmune sufferers have found substantial relief from chronic inflammatory symptoms and flare-ups with a very clean-source (i.e., organic, grass-fed) "Paleo" approach to eating which makes perfect sense from many perspectives...not the least of which is minimizing a potentially antigenic load. Far and away the most damaged and intractable brains and nervous systems I have ever worked with have--to the letter--all been long time vegans and many vegetarians. In the end for many, veganism (other than raw, strictly vegetable based diets) is often a starch-based, highly processed and highly antigenic (i.e., immune dysregulating/food sensitivity provoking) diet, resulting in elevated insulin levels, inflammatory issues, anxiety and other brain related disorders, rampant nutrient deficiencies, biliary problems and malabsorption issues. In the short term one might temporarily feel better (particularly if coming off of the "standard American diet"), but the long term outcome tends to be a disaster. Cleansing is simply not the same as rebuilding.

- Did you ever consider or experiment with vegan or vegetarian eating? If so, how and why? What was your experience with it?

I did give both vegetarianism and veganism a good go once upon a time. It initially appealed to my sense of what I believed must be healthy (given certain stereotypical mainstream ideas and myths about nutrition). It also appealed to my love of animals. It was most definitely not a good fit in the end and left me with a more or less constant (unhealthy) preoccupation with food, cravings and severe mood-related issues. I eventually developed an eating disorder which for me ultimately resolved with my return to animal source foods. It was an important learning experience.

- How would you respond to vegan critics who say that Paleo diets rely on meat and other animal products and are therefore unhealthy or unethical?

See my previous answer to another question where I covered this.

I will also add that the health of any meat is directly related to the health of the animal that meat came from. Any meat from an animal fed foods unnatural to it (i.e., grains and other odd substances commonly used as filler), shot full of hormones and antibiotics and forced into crowded, cruel and stressful conditions is NOT healthy food. This is a point upon which most paleo followers and vegans/vegetarians can commonly agree. The alternative to this is not of necessity vegetarianism or veganism. There are a growing number of principled and passionate farmers working very, very hard to do the right and ethical thing and give their animals humane treatment, fresh air, sunshine and plenty of natural, fresh green grass to eat. In the end, all things wind up as food for something else and all living beings in this world must kill in order to eat--even a vegetarian. Its all about the consciousness and attitude you bring to it. Death is a part of life. And life is not a ladder or chain...Life is a Circle of which we are all a part. It's trying to live outside that Circle or our place in it that gets us into trouble...whether we are merely indifferent or antagonistic to it's principles or whether we somehow feel we exist above it.

- What would you say to critics who believe that the prohibition of grains is extreme, unnecessary and perhaps not suited to all individuals?

I would say they did not have a grasp of the dizzying ocean of literature in the field of immunology, gastroenterology, neurology or metabolic science pouring out right now and underscoring the adverse impacts of grains in all these areas of health. I would also say there is a lack of grasp of the depth and breadth of gluten's devastating influence over more disease processes than I have room to list here. The undeniable connection between grains and every manner of immunological/inflammatory, neurological and physiological disease process is literally overwhelming and deeply, deeply troubling. The incidence of full blown celiac disease (really only the **tip** of the gluten sensitivity iceberg) has risen literally **400%** in the last 50 years, according to an article in the journal *Gastroenterology* (which I cite in my book--together with innumerable other peer-reviewed sources). Autoimmune disease, right behind cancer and heart disease--both also potentially adversely influenced by grain consumption-- is now collectively the **#3** cause of mortality in the industrialized world...and is overwhelmingly under diagnosed. Gluten is either known to be potentially causative or commonly exacerbating of all three. Dr. Kenneth Fine, a medical gastroenterologist and pioneer in the field, found through widespread testing that **1 in 3 Americans** are gluten intolerant, and that **8 in 10** are genetically predisposed to some form of gluten intolerance. Recent refinement and advancement of gluten testing via Cyrex Labs and recent immunology research is revealing even greater, more disturbing numbers and implications. Gluten intolerance can present with inflammation in the joints, skin, respiratory tract and brain...almost anywhere, with devastating impact on immune, psychiatric and/or neurological function -- even without any obvious gut symptoms.

This is a growing and very real public health catastrophe at a time where few can afford or find good health care (in a profit-oriented disease management paradigm). No one that lives or breathes anywhere on this planet has a "grain deficiency"...but countless millions suffer from the myriad of potentially devastating effects of grains on their health, many of whom don't even suspect the underlying culprit. --And for a gluten intolerant individual (who may well not even realize they suffer from this) even trace exposure is enough to have substantial and reverberating impact. **How much inflammation or neurodegeneration, gastrointestinal damage or auto-antibody production should we enjoy "in moderation"?** What is "extreme" is not the avoidance of grains but their unprecedented (relating to the previous 2.6 million years of human history) unnatural prevalence in our modern food supply. We've been incorporating grains for no more than the last 0.4% of our total evolutionary history and have only ourselves modified genetically an estimated .005% from our pre-agricultural genetic makeup (Eaton SB et al.

(1985) "Paleolithic nutrition: A consideration of its nature and current implications." *N Engl J Med*, vol. 312, pp. 283-289). We are simply ill designed and poorly suited to consume these foods. Even supposedly non-gluten containing grains can have cross-reactivity with gluten (meaning a person's immune system may react to other grains "as if" they are gluten-containing) and all grains have potential metabolic consequences due to their phytate, gluteomorphin, protease inhibiting and starch content, even where immunologic sensitivity may not be an issue. Studies show overwhelmingly that eating grains is a form of Russian roulette we'd all do well to avoid in today's severely compromised and contaminated modern environment. That said, it's everyone's choice, depending on what it is they most prioritize. I know where my priorities are.

- What are the challenges of subscribing to a Paleo diet in today's world?

The challenge--for any of us wanting to eat well--is in locating uncompromised sources of quality and sustainably/ethically raised meat and vegetables. For those not exercising some form of beneficial (longevity-enhancing) modified caloric restriction, as I am inclined to advocate, the challenge can also be economical. Real quality food comes with a price tag which in this economy can result in a real burden, especially if you don't know how to think about or plan things. I have recently made available some resources on my web site to help radically slash food costs for people and make this way of eating affordable for virtually everyone. Unfortunately, the widespread perception seems to be that to eat an optimally healthy diet isn't affordable. Au contraire...This is a tragic and unnecessary myth.

- If a conventional eater was to "lean Paleo" or begin embracing a more moderate version of the Paleo diet what would that look like?

The conventional eater would avoid the center isles at the grocery store where processed foods are and begin eating food (of the more "perishable variety") that would have looked like food to one of our most primitive ancestors (i.e., meat, poultry, fish, seafood, eggs, fibrous vegetables and greens, nuts and seeds and very little fruit). Avoiding all grains and most conventional dairy (except for *maybe* grass-fed butter or ghee, raw milk cheeses and lightly pasteurized heavy cream--only if well tolerated) would also be a great start. Avoid pre-packaged beverages and juices and stick to mostly water.

- What are the typical mistakes conventional eaters make as they begin experimenting with a Paleo approach to eating?

Assuming that the leanest possible meat and low fat are the "healthy" way to go (thanks to mainstream health mantra mythology)...which can result in fatigue and energy compromise along with aggravated carbohydrate cravings. Over eating meat is also in my view a mistake--the reasons for which are exhaustively outlined in my book. If you're losing the carbs then by necessity one must provide **sufficient** fat (and a variety of natural fats) to supply primary sources of energy, help facilitate protein digestion and to avoid a myriad of fat-soluble nutrient and mineral deficiencies. --And lots more protein is not necessarily better. **Sufficient** "complete" source protein is. If they are coming from a vegetarian or vegan background then the biggest mistake is changing too much too soon and diving into consuming lots of meat before their body has re-adapted to the idea. Even though eating meat is what is most natural to our physiological makeup long term issues with hydrochloric acid production or biliary health due to chronic disuse can result in bigger digestive issues if this is not carefully and systematically addressed. It's not a race. Baby steps in this instance is best. Sometimes the body needs to re-learn what it was meant to know all along.

- And, last question: Any great resources (books, films, websites, etc.) on Paleo diets that you'd like to share with us?

My own web site of course, which is www.PrimalBody-PrimalMind.com (be sure to sign up for my newsletter). One can also access countless hours of quality lectures (including one my Yours Truly) by some of the finest minds in the Ancestral Health movement at <http://ancestryfoundation.org/>. Beyond Veg.com is also a fairly exhaustive resource.

Denise Minger has an excellent web site: www.rawfoodssos.com. Also, her exhaustive and objective critical analysis of the "China Study" is an academic masterpiece.

DVD-wise I'm always happy to recommend "My Big Fat Diet", with Dr. Jay Wortman and Dr Stephen Phinney.