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Most Popular Searched Diet on Google

The Pros and Cons of the Paleo Diet

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

The most popular searched diet on Google in 2013 was the Paleo diet which is often referred to as the “caveman” or “stone-age” diet. If you are considering following this plan for the upcoming year ahead, here are some things to know:

What is the Paleo diet?

To put it simply the Paleo diet advocates that eating like our ancestors did 10,000 years ago will help you to reduce disease, lose weight and be healthier. Foods that are hunted, gathered or fished (grass produced meat, poultry, eggs, fish, shellfish, nuts as well as some oils, veggies and fruits) are permitted. Those that follow the Paleo diet suggest our body is genetically predisposed to eat only these foods. Paleo diet advocates suggest that during the agricultural revolution where grains, legumes, potatoes, dairy, salt and sugar began to be consumed has increased our risk of obesity, heart disease and diabetes.



Pros of the Paleo Diet

Any diet that places an emphasis on whole foods and eating less heavily processed foods with excess sugar and salt is a move in the right direction.

Those that have tried to follow the Paleo diet often eat a substantially higher level of produce and have trained their taste buds to enjoy these foods more. Based on long-term scientific evidence we know populations from around the world who consume a diet rich in veggies and fruit have wonderful protection against disease. In fact one of the top weight loss strategies we work on with our clients is increasing veggies and fruit since most people fall short. Since veggies and fruit are low in calories but provide volume to your plate, eating enough of these is key to fill up your eyes as much as fill up your stomach.

I've also noticed that folks following the Paleo diet are cooking more meals at home (since it would be hard to follow this plan if you don't like to cook). Getting people back to the basics of cooking and enjoying meals at home is one of my career missions. This is not only good for your health but also role models important life skills for kids and significantly **improves family health and connectedness** (<http://www.healthstandnutrition.com/establishing-healthy-family-nutrition-habits/>).

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Cons of the Paleo Diet

The Paleo diet has a few downfalls firstly that the protein and fat consumption of this diet exceeds the Dietary Reference Intakes (established by Canadian and American scientists through a review process overseen by the U.S. National Academies, which is an independent, nongovernmental body http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=10490). Although many healthy fats such as olive oil and nuts are permitted on the Paleo diet it is the high consumption of meat that is concerning especially if meats are high fat as they contain a high level of saturated fat which can raise blood cholesterol levels. Heavy emphasis on meat is also concerning from a cost and environmental perspective.

The Paleo diet is also low in carbohydrate considering foods such as grains, potatoes and legumes are not permitted. Long-term research suggests populations that consume a diet rich in whole grains and legumes manage a healthy weight and have a low risk of disease such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes. The Dietary Reference Intakes suggest the healthiest diets worldwide contain 45-65% carbohydrates. This would be very difficult to achieve on a Paleo diet.

Eliminating dairy foods unless you have a dairy allergy is not recommended. Although there is large individual variation, even those with a lactose intolerance can often manage small amounts of dairy foods. Dairy foods supply high levels of calcium and vitamin D for protection of bone health and osteoporosis along with other health benefits.

The Bottom Line

As a nutrition expert I see no need to unnecessarily remove healthy foods such as grains, legumes and dairy from your diet. If you look closely at the diet also you will see that even healthy foods such as higher sugar fruits are suggested to be removed if you are trying to lose weight. The diet starts to feel like a standard low-carb diet and research shows that you can lose weight from all types of diets (both low carb or high carb) as long as calories are decreased.

As a foodie and advocate for finding enjoyment in eating I see this diet as being very difficult to sustain and unenjoyable. I love my carbs including potatoes and fresh bread and at the end of the day portion sizes are key with all foods. Eliminating all sugar and salty foods also does not allow for much flexibility to eat soulfully and enjoy a meal at your neighbors house or at a restaurant. Clients of mine that eliminate many foods often find they struggle with bingeing. I prefer to live by the rules that **you can eat anything, just not everything. Make choices, watch your portion sizes and savor your bites mindfully.**

Want to hear about my favorite eating style? It's the Mediterranean Diet – read and watch more here: <http://www.healthstandnutrition.com/mediterranean-diet/>

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