

Making the Paleolithic Diet Work for You

By Adam Farrah, B.S.

I've been on some variation of a Paleolithic or "Primitive" diet for the last 5 years. I put this article together to make it easier for others to adopt a Paleolithic diet and take some time off the learning curve getting started. I've tried to present things as evenly as possible with a bias toward more information and a more complete picture rather than promoting one absolute way of doing things.

Since 2003, I've read over 60 diet, nutrition and "healthy lifestyle" books. I've also been personally coached by some of the top people in different nutrition and health fields. About the only thing I can say with certainty is that none of them agree on everything – and some don't agree on anything. But, studying that much material and engaging in that much experimentation allowed me to see a number of common threads between approaches. These are core principles that seem to be important for any healthy diet. From these I make my suggestions.

I don't give absolutes or get into the dietary pseudo-religion that a lot of authors like to get into. I don't think that helps anyone in the real world. Not everything works for everyone. I think much of the confusion happening in nutrition today – other than what's caused by politics or deliberate misinformation – is due to one person or a group of people taking what works *for them* and putting it forth as an absolute dietary law that everyone should follow.

My contention is that any successful diet will be one tuned to the individual's physiology, biochemistry, genetics, preferences and cultural bias. Some of these factors can also change with time. I've thrived on foods in the past that I could never eat now. And I eat foods now that I never would have years ago. It's very dynamic.

My primary approach to eating is Paleolithic because it is the most logical, sensible and effective approach I've encountered and experimented with. I've investigated other approaches and I suggest related ideas and resources that aren't strictly Paleolithic where I think they might be useful and could be investigated.

Why Paleolithic eating?

Briefly, a Paleolithic diet is the diet we evolved on as a species. Experts estimate the time we spent eating a Paleolithic or “Paleo” diet to be around 2,000,000 years. In contrast, there are the foods that result from agriculture – foods that have only been available to us for the last 10,000 years or so – like grains and dairy products. Finally, we have so called “modern foods” – highly processed foods that have only been available for the last 100 years or less – like packaged foods, white sugar, canned foods, white flour and pasteurized dairy.

Even more recently, “foods” and substances have appeared that are nothing like anything our bodies have ever been exposed to – things like genetically modified foods, pesticides, factory raised meats, irradiated foods, pharmaceuticals and food additives and preservatives.

Our bodies have had only a few generations to adapt to agriculture based foods like grain and dairy. Not surprisingly, gluten and dairy allergies are the most common food allergies in the world. Our bodies have had virtually no time to adapt to modern and highly processed foods. Prominent authors throughout the years have correlated a decline in human health and the proliferation of “modern diseases” like cancer, intestinal disorders, heart disease and diabetes with the increased consumption of agricultural, modern and highly processed foods.

Eating a Paleolithic diet is an effort to provide the body with the foods and nutrients it is most ideally suited for and is adapted to by the power of millions of years of evolution.

Two of the best sources for in-depth discussion on human evolution as it relates to food and the impact of modern foods on human health are works by Loren Cordain, author of The Paleo Diet, and Weston A. Price and the Weston A. Price Foundation (<http://westonaprice.org>).

What's on a "Paleolithic Diet?"

What is and isn't a Paleolithic food is pretty clear. Different authors have their own changes and tweaks, but most will agree on the major points.

A Paleolithic Diet always includes:

- Meat
- Vegetables (usually excluding corn and white potato and possibly sweet potato)
- Fruits (usually in a limited quantity)

A Paleolithic Diet does NOT include:

- Any type of milk or milk product including yogurt, cheese and whey, casein or milk protein powders
- Wheat or anything made with wheat including: bread, granola, cereal, etc.
- Starchy vegetables like corn and potatoes
- Rice – brown or white
- Soy and soy products of any kind
- Beans and legumes
- Processed sugar of any kind
- Grain of any kind (usually)
- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Anything processed, packaged, refined or man-made

There are some gray areas, though...

Eggs

Most Paleolithic theorists will include eggs in a Paleo diet. This isn't always appropriate because, as the argument goes, early man didn't have a lot of opportunity to get eggs in the wild. Some people do have an allergy or intolerance to eggs and that may be because they aren't a food we were exposed to on a large scale throughout our evolution. Be sure you tolerate and thrive on eggs if you plan to include them in your diet.

Bacon

Because it's cured and usually contains nitrates and nitrites, bacon isn't a terribly healthy food. I've found that I get a headache and become fatigued after eating commercial bacon. I've noticed the same problem with commercial sausages and bratwurst and I believe it's the additives they put in these types of foods.

I have yet to find an organic, chemical free bacon that has a decent flavor. I recommend eating bacon sparingly and staying aware of any effects it may have on you when you eat it.

“Primitive” Grains

Some authors will recommend including the so called primitive grains such as Quinoa (pronounced “keen-wah”), barley, buckwheat, spelt, etc. in the diet. This strategy won’t work for everyone. Primitive grains may be better than gluten-containing grains like wheat, but no grain is strictly a Paleolithic food and many people will do almost as poorly on supposedly “non-allergenic” grains as they would on wheat.

I recommend avoiding grains of any kind unless you do very well on them and have a high carbohydrate requirement. Even then, I would use them sparingly.

Nuts and seeds

This is a very subjective area. After all, nuts and seeds are part of the CrossFit dietary credo. Truthfully, nuts and seeds would have been difficult for our primitive ancestors to gather and eat in any quantity. They are also difficult for some people to digest.

Raw seeds like flax and sunflower can be good sources of fiber and omega-3 oils. If you want to try them be sure to get them whole, raw and organic and grind them freshly for yourself in a small coffee grinder. I like the Krups Fast Touch grinder.

Be sure to refrigerate the ground seeds in a container with a tight lid and only grind them a few days or a week ahead. You want to do everything you can to protect the delicate omega-3 oils from oxidizing and becoming useless and possibly even unhealthy. And don’t EVER buy the pre-ground seeds in the bags. They’re old and almost certainly rancid no matter how fresh you try to buy them.

Also, remember that peanuts aren’t nuts. They’re a legume and a very new food. Avoid peanuts and peanut butter in any form.

Nightshade vegetables

The Nightshades include tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and white potatoes. These foods are considered “newer” foods, evolutionarily speaking, and can cause problems for some people. As with peanuts, dairy and wheat, it’s a recurring theme that the newer foods are those most people are allergic to.

Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes are an interesting gray area. Sweet potatoes are considered more Paleolithic than white potatoes by some authors because they are a much older food and are related to the root vegetables and tubers we would have evolved on.

A counter argument here is that ANY food that needs to be cooked to be eaten and digested wouldn’t have been a common food for our Paleolithic ancestors.

There are a number of sources that recommend including sweet potatoes in a Paleo diet for an athlete. This includes at least some of the CrossFit Endurance guys (www.crossfitendurance.com).

Dairy

Dairy is a gray area because some nutritional theorists who espouse a Paleo or “primitive” approach also recommend raw cow’s milk, cream and butter. What’s going on here? Virtually all of these people follow the work of Weston A. Price. Dr. Price was a dentist who traveled the world at the beginning of the 20th Century and studied the few cultures who were still isolated from the modern world. He found these isolated peoples to be in thriving health with no trace of modern diseases.

When studying their diets, Price found a hunter gatherer diet with some farming (organic of course) and the use of raw – usually fermented – dairy. Along these same lines, there’s the work of François Pottenger who also advocated a raw milk supplemented diet. In short, anytime an author talks about raw dairy – particularly cow – that author is virtually guaranteed to follow a Weston A. Price and François Pottenger approach. Paul Chek is an advocate of this approach.

Dairy is a particularly frustrating topic for me. A large number of weight training coaches and authors imbue milk and milk protein with an almost mythical power. It’s considered the “perfect food” by many inside and outside of the training and athletic world. Many early bodybuilders and weightlifters made a habit of drinking a lot of milk and some very respectable authors have great things to say about it.

But, dairy just plain does not work for some people. And I think the number of people with a milk allergy or intolerance is a lot higher than many estimate. Personally, I feel terrible on any kind of dairy. I’ve spent a lot of time, money and energy trying to get dairy to work for me and it just doesn’t in any form at this point.

I’m including some of what I know about milk and dairy products in case this is something you want to pursue and experiment with.

Why Raw over pasteurized?

The whole raw dairy thing is interesting. “They” would have us believe that dairy foods must be pasteurized to keep us safe. Most authors who advocate a milk-based approach will assert the opposite.

Raw Cow and Goat Dairy

There are a number of authors who follow Paleolithic or “primitive” diet principles and advocate raw – meaning unpasteurized – dairy products. Most are advocates of raw cow’s milk

while a smaller number recommend raw goat's milk. Author Jordan Rubin is probably the most well known advocate of raw cultured (yogurt or kefir) goat's milk.

Raw dairy is considered to be much healthier and easier to digest. The main reason is that pasteurization (boiling or heating, basically) destroys the milk proteins by denaturing them. Denaturing is the technical term for what happens when a protein loses its native structure. Denatured protein is harder for us to digest and may be more allergenic.

Contributing to the digestion problem is the fact that enzymes are proteins. Dairy products have their own natural enzymes – like lactase. Pasteurization destroys the natural enzymes in the food and this makes digestion more difficult as well.

Something I've always found insane – and a great example of the idiocy that goes on in the mainstream food industry – is Lactaid® milk. They pasteurize the milk and destroy all the lactase that's in it naturally, then they add synthetic lactase back in and triple the price. From a business standpoint it's genius!

At this point, I need to say that mass-produced commercial milk really does need to be pasteurized. The terrible conditions the cows are kept under make the raw milk they produce very dangerous. Virtually all cows in commercial dairies are sick and living under very unsanitary conditions. This is one of the reasons pasteurization is necessary for most milk produced today.

Raw dairy from animals raised and maintained on small family farms is much safer and pasteurization isn't necessary according to most authors. The taste and quality of the product is also far superior to the industrial stuff available at the supermarket. Not to mention the animals live under better conditions.

I have an allergy to any dairy at this point. I think goat dairy may be less allergenic than cow's milk or yogurt, but no dairy works for me right now. If you really like dairy and feel you truly, TRULY don't have an allergy to it, you could try raw, organic cow or goat dairy to see how you feel on it. I would recommend reintroducing dairy after a period of no dairy to make sure you can evaluate the effects of dairy on things like sinus congestion, acne or skin problems, headaches and bathroom habits. Dairy can be highly allergenic and should be handled carefully.

Also, keep in mind that raw dairy won't be available everywhere because some states and lawmakers consider it "dangerous." Visit www.realmilk.com to find raw milk in your area. Raw cheeses are easier to find, but they aren't always organic or grassfed.

Those who advocate a Weston A. Price style diet will be hardcore defenders of raw cow milk and advocate its inclusion in a "primitive" diet. But this is a primitive diet and not a Paleo diet.

Raw dairy can be a great food for SOME but it can be very allergenic for others. This will depend primarily on your genetics and somewhat on your lifestyle and other factors.

Is the Paleolithic Diet doable long-term?

Yes. It does take some getting used to, though. There's an adaptation period both physically and mentally. I once heard an author (I think it was Sally Fallon) describe the current state of our appetite and taste buds as equivalent to being blind or deaf – we were designed by evolution to find nutritious foods appetizing, but modern food and food additives have dulled our natural instincts. We now feel much more attracted to fake foods and things like soda, pizza, alcohol and donuts than we do to green vegetables, fruits and plain, healthy meats.

An interesting side note here is that we're adapted to crave the sweetest foods we can find. This supposedly happened because, during our evolution, the only sweet foods available were fruits and fresh honey. The sweeter foods were the ripest and most nutritious. Fruit and honey weren't available all the time, so it made sense to be programmed to eat a larger amount when they were available. Now, we have artificial substances that are hundreds or thousands of times sweeter than anything available during our evolution. Our primitive taste buds naturally prefer the artificial foods because they evaluate them as more nutritious based on sweetness.

So, yes, this is a diet you can do long term. It requires some discipline, some time to adapt and some preparation and effort. But, yes, it can be a lifelong diet.

Some argue it's not a terribly "sociable" diet, but I don't consider that too big of a deal. I've found that the longer I'm on a healthy diet and living a healthy lifestyle, the stranger and stranger "normal" behavior looks to me. After years of strict dieting, things like pizza and candy have finally stopped looking like food to me. More importantly, I don't crave non-Paleo foods anymore. It does get better with time. It's our natural state to eat healthy, unprocessed foods.

What about nutrient deficiencies?

This is an interesting question. I actually had a conversation with a Registered Dietician about this topic. Her brilliant assertion was that we needed things like dairy for the calcium and vitamin D. That sounds sensible, except that we've only had access to dairy in any reasonable quantity for about 10,000 years and most of the calcium and vitamin D in dairy is SYNTHETIC AND ADDED DURING PROCESSING. And this only happened within the last 50 years or so. How can we be deficient in something that had no place in our evolution? We can't.

There are some supplements and foods that can make a Paleo diet work better, but the argument that we need processed or modern foods to avoid deficiency is idiocy. There is no way we can be deficient in anything our ancestors didn't have access to. We are not "deficient" in Cheerios®, Ensure®, whey protein, beer, Pringles® or anything they contain. No one has a Lipitor®, Viagra® or Prilosec® deficiency either.

A healthy diet should be simple and composed of only those foods that would be readily available in nature. It should also supply all our nutritional needs with relative ease. This is a major argument I have with the raw vegan approach and it's a standard I use to evaluate any diet I look at. Raw vegan dieting requires a fantastic amount of work and understanding to meet calorie requirements, keep blood sugar levels stable and deal with the low fat and protein inherent in the diet. To me, any diet that requires advanced knowledge and a lot of work and effort isn't a natural diet. It probably won't be a healthy one either.

If a wide enough variety of foods are eaten, you should be fine on a Paleo diet. If you're concerned, consult a physician. I recommend having testing for deficiency done so you have an objective measurement though. An intellectual discussion about Paleo dieting with virtually any health professional is going to be met with a lot of warnings and talk about deficiencies even though they really have no idea what they're talking about or what the diet is really about. It's Standard Operating Procedure. (Of course, after they dismiss the Paleo diet, they'll recommend Cheerios for fiber and give you a prescription for Zoloft®. Very healthy!)

Is a Paleolithic diet boring or unappetizing?

It doesn't have to be! A good gas grill is probably your best friend on a Paleolithic diet. Also, Sally Fallon and Mary Enig have written extensively on traditional, Paleo-style cooking. The book *Nourishing Traditions* by them is a great resource. Do keep in mind that they advocate a "traditional" diet – unprocessed but including non-Paleo foods like milk and some grains – so not all of their recipes will be appropriate. Books on grilling, soups and stews and even vegetarian cook books for the vegetable-specific recipes are also great. Food Network is great for inspiration too, but there's a lot of non-Paleo stuff on there so watch out for cravings and the messages about eating garbage it will expose you to!



My Facebook friends are used to me posting pictures of my food. This is an all-organic meal of free-range chicken, grassfed beef, real fermented pickles and grilled sweet potatoes.



A very simple all-organic grassfed beef stew. Beef, carrots, onions, celery, garlic, parsley and water. That's it.

Do Zone-Paleo

Zone-Paleo is eating Paleolithic foods in Zone proportions. The Zone is the excellent diet by Barry Sears that recommends a 40/30/30 percent ratio of carbs, protein and fat, respectively, in every meal. This is a great way to portion Paleo foods and can really help if you have fat loss goals. I've written more about this topic on my blog (<http://deathbywallball.com/blog/zone-paleo-diet-crossfit>).

If you have fat loss goals, any issues with blood sugar control or difficulty keeping your energy levels stable throughout the day, read *Enter The Zone* by Barry Sears and give Zone-Paleo a try.

Don't do Zone-Paleo

I know, I just said to DO Zone-Paleo. The thing is, there are no absolutes in nutrition and it's best to look at all sides. Zone-Paleo has the advantage of controlling insulin levels. The Zone Diet also gives you a very clear formula for determining daily calorie requirements as well as requirements for protein, carbs and fat.

There are two arguments I can make against a Zone approach. The first is that some people will naturally digest a single food – called a mono-meal by some authors – better than they will a combination of foods. The second argument, which might provide explanation of the first, is that early humans wouldn't have had access to foods in combinations and certainly wouldn't have eaten them in precise proportions.

In most cases, I think a Zone-Paleo approach is a good idea. Particularly if you're interested in fat loss. If you have any type of digestive issue, be sure to experiment with both Zone and mono-meal approaches.

Organic Foods

I think organic foods are an absolute necessity for good health and to protect the environment and future generations. Some authors don't put a lot of emphasis on organic foods and I think this is a mistake. Other authors will tell you that you can eat virtually anything you want as long as it *is* organic. I think this is a mistake too. There's a lot of organic "junk food" out there and there will be a lot more as the general public becomes more and more interested in organic eating.

Organic isn't just about "no pesticides." Pesticides are only the beginning. Most non-organic produce is genetically modified at this point. Most is also irradiated to kill the dangerous bacteria strains that are attracted to the poorly raised, genetically modified and pesticide-laden food. It's really a big mess.

Most importantly, don't ever let anyone tell you that some produce or other food is OK to buy non-organic because the pesticides can be washed off or removed with the peel. Pesticides are only the beginning of the problems and dangers with non-organic foods.

Eat the Best Meats You Can Get

Meat is an interesting topic and there's a lot of confusion about it. Here are some of the major points to keep in mind when choosing meat.

Don't Eat Conventionally Raised Meat – EVER

There are a number of problems with conventionally raised meats that you get in a grocery store. These are grain feeding (usually non-organic grains besides), hormones and antibiotics, irradiation, poor handling practices, contamination and other issues. I recommend only eating small scale farmed, organic meat that has been raised under humane and sanitary conditions and fed food appropriate to the animal and how it evolved.

All Grassfed Beef is NOT Created Equally

I've been amazed at the difference in taste and quality between different types of "grassfed" beef I've tried. At this point I do my best to ONLY get my beef from a trusted source where I can personally verify how it's been handled. There are a lot of advantages to having a personal relationship with the people who grow or raise your food.

One problem with store-bought "grassfed" beef is that legally it only needs to be fed a certain percentage of grass to be labeled grassfed. This means the cows can be raised on grain and other inappropriate foods and then "finished" on grass and called grassfed. Is the organic grassfed beef from Whole Foods or another market better than regular beef? Absolutely. But I'm not convinced it's the greatest.

The best source I've found for grassfed beef is Alder Spring Ranch in Idaho (www.alderspring.com). They have the best tasting beef I've ever eaten and I can call Glenn and Caryl directly to get what I need. I find it interesting that grassfed beef raised on a ranch by people with a personal stake in the product tastes 100 times better than grassfed beef from a natural market. That tells me that there are many differences in the raising and handling that are apparent in the finished product. An interesting side note here is that the Alder Spring beef tends to last several days longer in the refrigerator when it's raw than any other beef I've tried.



Grassfed organic beef from Alder Spring Ranch in May, Idaho.

Organic Does NOT Mean Grassfed

Organic beef is still very likely raised in confinement under poor conditions, although they won't be as poor as they are in conventional farming. The poorer the husbandry conditions, the more likely the animals will require antibiotics to keep alive and healthy. These animals are fed organic grains under most circumstances. And grain is no more suitable to cows for food than it is for humans.

Only beef labeled organic AND grassfed is both. Organic just means organic and isn't the best choice.

Choosing chicken, eggs and fish

Good chicken, eggs and fish tend to be easier to find than good beef. Chicken should be free-range and organic. These chickens will be much easier to find whole than they are in parts. For chickens and their eggs, pastured or free-range are always preferable to "cage free." In virtually all cases, cage free only means that the chickens are allowed to move freely within a barn. They are still deprived of sunlight and will be eating a diet composed of grain. Free range, pastured chickens get sunlight, exercise and have opportunity to scratch for their natural diet, worms and insects. Meat and eggs from free range animals will always be more nutritious and healthier for humans.

Fish should always be wild-caught and not farmed. Most supermarkets, natural food markets and fish markets now distinguish between the two in their display labeling. Smaller fish that are lower on the food chain are also preferable because they've had less time to accumulate toxins

in their tissues. The most prevalent of these toxins being mercury. Even wild-caught fish, particularly salmon, can be injected with dye to make it look better in the seafood case. Be sure not to buy any fish that has been dyed or treated with preservatives.

What about animal rights?

As an animal lover, I do have some trouble eating animals. I don't see any way around it though – our genes and evolution dictate that we eat animals and I value my health too much to give up meat. I've tried vegan and vegetarian diets and I start to fall apart physically when I'm on either too long.

All this said, I advocate ONLY eating properly raised meats. Properly raised means cows are pastured and eating grass almost exclusively, chickens are free range (not just “cage free”) and fish is wild caught. All meats should be organic meaning they aren't pumped full of hormones and antibiotics. Not only are animals raised properly on small farms healthier for us, the animal has a much more pleasant and natural life. Interestingly, when animals are raised properly and under healthy conditions, they don't need hormones or antibiotics to grow and stay healthy in the first place.

I recommend staying away from all supermarket and industrially farmed meats if you're concerned about animal rights. Properly raised, organic animals live a much, much better life and we at least owe them that if we're going to eat them.

Which fruits and how much?

Fruit is another interesting topic and can be confusing. Not everyone agrees on which fruits to eat or how much of them to eat. Most Paleo authors will recommend a limited amount of fruit. Some authors, like Barry Sears, will recommend certain fruits and not others based on glycemic index. Because I've also spent a fair amount of time experimenting with a raw vegan approach to diet, I don't have as much prejudice against fruit.

I usually eat a large amount of fruit. I do particularly well on bananas. Some consider this one of the higher glycemic index fruits, but I don't find I have much of a problem with them. I also like strawberries and mangos. I primarily eat these fruits as smoothies blended with some water, flax oil and rice protein powder.

I have found that I don't do well on melon, apples or pears. Here's where the individual component comes into play. Apples may be theoretically better than bananas according to some authors, but they don't agree with me at all.

The bottom line is, some people will do better on more fruit and some will do better on less. Some fruits will work for some people and not others. It takes a lot of experimentation to figure out the best diet for you as an individual.

Take High Doses of GOOD Cod Liver Oil or Fish Oil

Cod liver or fish oil?

The difference between cod liver and fish oil is vitamin D content. Cod liver oil has more vitamin D than regular fish oil. It's usually recommended to take cod liver oil during the winter when sun exposure is lower and take fish oil in the summer when you're getting more sun and you'll naturally be making more vitamin D. Some sources recommend taking cod liver oil all year round if you have a health condition or are concerned about inflammation from training. I take cod liver oil all year round.

What about quality?

I take Carlson Liquid Cod Liver Oil. I use about 4-5 Tablespoons a day with meals. Don't forget to figure the calories and fat content of the oil into your meal planning and calculations. I don't use the capsules because they often contain soy or other processed oils and they don't have enough oil in them – you'd need to take handfuls at every meal to get a decent dosage. Barry Sears wrote extensively on fish oil in *The Anti-Inflammation Zone*. He also recommends very specific fish oil supplements and dosages in that book.

How much fat?

How much fat you eat depends on a number of factors. Most diet authors recommend “lean” meats. These same authors usually don't distinguish between conventional and organically raised meats. I'm with the Weston A. Price camp on fat consumption. I think fat from healthy animals is very healthy for humans and is a necessity in the diet.

I absolutely do not avoid certain cuts of meat or certain types of meat because of fat content. I actually started eating dark chicken meat to get more good fat into my diet. I also supplement with flax, coconut and cod liver oil. This drives my fat up to about 50% of my diet on some days. I don't consider it a problem.

What about fat and cholesterol ?

A full discussion of “The Lipid Hypothesis” is well beyond the scope of this short article. What I will say is the idea that dietary fat causes high cholesterol and heart disease is now highly suspect and is even being rejected within the mainstream medical establishment. If anyone tells you that the high fat content of a Paleo diet will cause heart disease or high cholesterol, realize that they are basing that on old and outdated research and ideas that even the mainstream medical establishment has begun to question.

Fat and The Zone

The Zone diet and the amount of fat you eat on it is based on a number of factors. Coach Glassman has written on this as have others in CrossFit Journal. In her CrossFit Journal article [Getting off the Crack](#), Nicole Carroll discusses how a higher fat Zone approach worked for her.

My experience here is limited at the moment, but successful CrossFitters are reporting using two to five times the basic Zone fat prescription with good results.

Use Paleo “Cheat Meals” to Keep Sane

There are some things that I eat from time to time that are “cheats” when you’re talking about strict Paleo. But, these are still relatively healthy foods and they’re better than eating a dozen donuts on a Sunday because you’re craving something sweet.

Dried Fruit

Dried fruit isn’t considered strictly Paleo because it’s a highly concentrated, high sugar food. When I start really craving though, I find that I need something to take the edge off. In this case, I think dried fruit is a much better cheat option than a lot of the other stuff out there – like the dozen donuts that also run through my head when I’m craving.

Raw Organic Almond Butter

Again, I’m not fully convinced a large quantity of nuts is something our ancestors evolved on or had a lot of access to. Because they’re raw, organic and ground into a butter, I think raw organic almond butter is a good choice for a “cheat” that’s still relatively good for you. Almond butter with some raw honey and sea salt is delicious and should help keep you away from the REALLY non-Paleo stuff.

Raw Honey

Really Raw Brand raw honey is absolutely delicious. I use it in a few of my cheat recipes and sometimes just have a few spoons of it right out of the jar as a treat. Again, not strictly Paleo and full of sugar, but not the worst thing you can eat either.

Bananas, fresh fruit, dates, ground flax seeds, almond butter and honey

This is one of my favorite cheats. It’s especially good when I’m really craving carbohydrates. I mash a few ripe bananas up with a fork, put a few tablespoons of raw ground flax seeds and/or sunflower seeds on them, throw some dates on top of that and add honey and almond butter. If I have any, I add other fresh fruit like peaches, strawberries, etc.



Mashed bananas, ground flax and sunflower seeds, dates, raw honey, raw organic almond butter and fresh peaches. A healthy Paleo “cheat.”

What About Protein Powders?

There’s really no such thing as a Paleolithic protein powder. Most protein powders are made with non-organic, over-processed and over-heated milk. This includes whey and casein protein powders. Soy protein is another problem protein powder. It’s highly allergenic, usually digests poorly and has a number of other problems. Definitely avoid whey, casein and soy.

It’s important to understand that ALL protein powders are concentrated and processed foods that would, ideally, have no place in a Paleolithic diet.

I do realize that protein powder is convenient and can be particularly helpful when trying to adhere to a Zone-Paleo diet as it makes the precise ratios more practical to achieve. I’ve had some success using a raw rice protein powder called Sun Warrior. It’s the most digestible, minimally processed protein powder I’ve found. If you need to use a protein powder for convenience, try this one. I have a link to it on my website.

What about post-workout meals?

Post workout nutrition is a topic that gets a lot of attention. Some will tell you it’s absolutely vital that you nail the post-workout meal perfectly. I think getting the post-workout meal right is important, but I know that a lot of muscle has been built by people who either had no idea

about post-workout nutrition or were training long before *anyone* knew *anything* about post-workout nutrition.

Last year I read the outstanding book “Muscle, Smoke and Mirrors, Volume I” by Randy Roach. It’s a huge work on the history of physical culture up to the 1960’s. One thing that struck me was early bodybuilders and strongmen basically knew nothing about post workout nutrition at this point in time. A post workout meal would be something like 2lbs of steak for some of these guys. Probably not the best choice based on what we know today, but these were fantastically strong, tough and well conditioned men.

If you’re going to try and work with nutrient timing and the post-workout insulin sensitivity you have, I recommend eating a larger quantity of fruit immediately after exercise. I usually do a fruit smoothie of primarily bananas in water with some other fruits, some rice protein and a small amount of flax or coconut oil.

I highly recommend that you avoid any type of commercial post-workout drinks or shakes. These will virtually always be highly processed and contain dairy proteins, corn syrup solids, processed oils and other garbage.

What About Coffee and Caffeine?

Coffee and caffeine are just plain NOT Paleo. This is something I personally struggle with because it’s the only vice I indulge in and I’ve found it difficult to give up coffee and caffeine long term – particularly when I’m writing.

If you want to know all the details about caffeine and its effects on health read the book *Caffeine Blues* by Stephen Cherniske. The book is extremely well written, extensively referenced and completely free of politics and commercial influences.

Caffeine has a number of negative effects on metabolism, insulin sensitivity, adrenal function and sleep. In fact, this is just the beginning. There are a lot of reasons to eliminate or at least cut back on caffeine.

Use Fresh Organic Coffee and Grind and Brew it Yourself

If you’re going to drink coffee, there are a few things you can do to make it healthier. I recommend **ONLY** drinking fresh ground, fresh brewed organic coffee. Use pure filtered water to brew it as well.

Organic coffee is very important because coffee isn’t grown in the US. That means that overseas farmers can still use pesticides that are no longer legal or considered safe in the US when growing non-organic coffee beans. My advice is to avoid or minimize any non-organic coffee in your diet.

You can use the same Krups grinder I mention above for nuts and seeds. I also recommend grinding your coffee just a few days or a week ahead and storing the ground coffee in the refrigerator or freezer. There are delicate oils in ground coffee that can become rancid when exposed to air.

The best coffee maker I've ever used is the Cuisinart DCC-1200. I recommend it if you're going to brew your own coffee.

Organic Coffee Brands

My two favorite organic coffee brands are Equal Exchange and Allegro Coffee. Equal Exchange is available at independent natural food stores and Allegro is at Whole Foods and others.

In Conclusion

Above all, remember that everyone is different and everyone will have their own unique "ideal" diet. What works well for one person won't work exactly the same for another. That doesn't mean there aren't basic principles for a healthy diet that everyone should follow, but it does mean you should be aware of what your own body is telling you. I become very frustrated with authors and theorists who claim they have the ONE diet everyone should follow and never address valid criticism or real issues that their clients have when making the diet work in the real world. Yes, some principles – like the Paleolithic diet – are highly valid, elegant and useful. But diets always require individualization and fine-tuning to work as well as they can.

About this article and the author

This article was written by [Adam Farrah](#) and is based on excerpts from his soon to be released eBook, *Practical Paleolithic*. Visit www.practicalpaleolithic.com for more information.

Adam has a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from the University of Connecticut and is a CrossFit Level 1 certified coach and IKFF Certified Kettlebell Teacher under Steve Cotter and Ken Blackburn. He lives in Middletown, CT and owns and runs [CrossFit Middletown](#).

An Important Note

This article contains the author's personal opinions based on his own research and experience. The information presented is not intended to diagnose, treat or cure any disease and is presented for informational purposes only. Any reader uses the information herein at his or her own risk and discretion.

References and Recommended Reading

Enter The Zone – Barry Sears, Ph.D.

The Anti-Inflammation Zone – Barry Sears, Ph. D.

The Paleo Diet – Loren Cordain, Ph.D.

The Warrior Diet – Ori Hofmekler

Restoring Your Digestive Health – Jordan S. Rubin, N.M.D. and Joseph Brasco, M.D.

The Maker's Diet – Jordan S. Rubin

Caffeine Blues – Stephen Cherniske, M.S.

The 80/10/10 Diet – Dr. Douglas N. Graham

Muscle, Smoke and Mirrors, Volume I – Randy Roach

Nourishing Traditions, Second Edition – Sally Fallon with Mary Enig, Ph.D.

You Are What You Eat (CD Audio Program) – Paul Chek