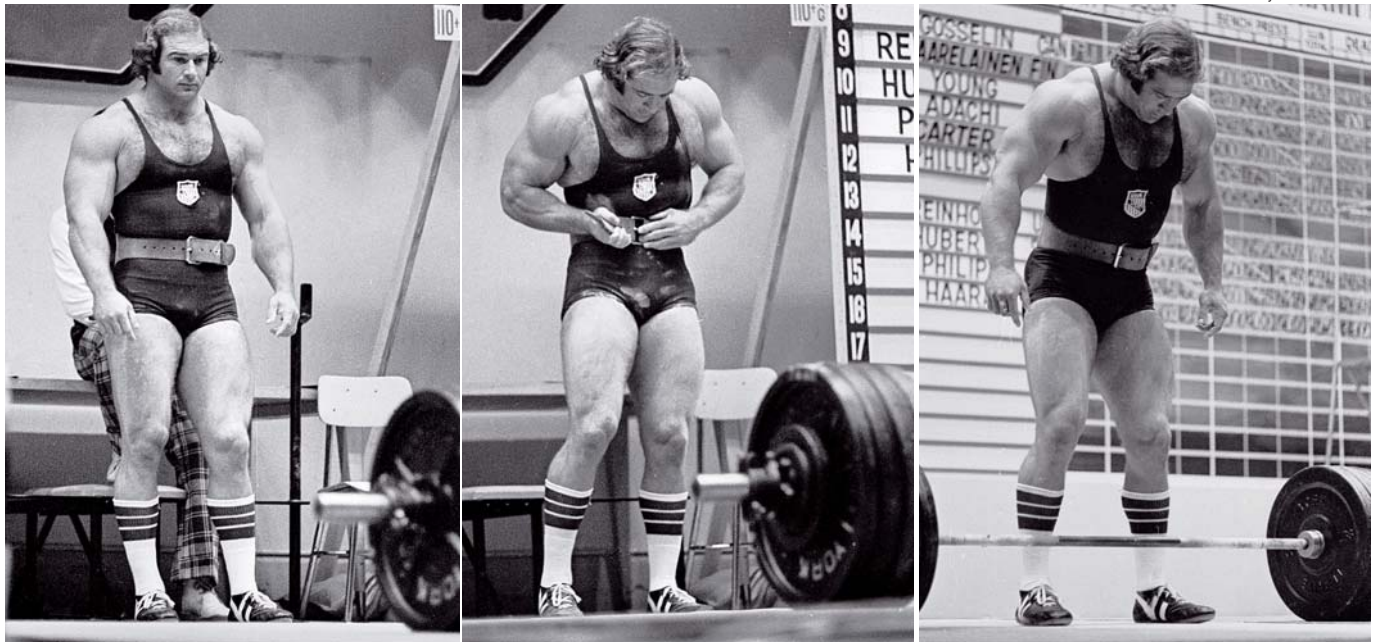


A Closer Look at the *Paleo Diet*

The benefits of eating like our Stone Age ancestors

Photos by Bruce Klemens



Developing the muscle power needed to lift heavy weights requires sound, basic nutrition. Shown is Doug Young, who won the IPF World Powerlifting Championships in 1975-1977 in the 242-pound bodyweight class. His older brother, Bob Young, played 16 seasons in the NFL as an offensive guard.

Since *BFS* magazine was first published in 1981, we've presented many excellent articles about nutrition and supplements. In recent years there has been an explosion of articles about the Paleo diet. Is this the ideal nutrition method?

The word *Paleolithic* comes from combining *paleo* ("old") and *lithic* ("stone"). When we speak of Paleolithic people, we are talking about the earliest known *Homo sapiens* – in other words, our Stone Age ancestors. This era occurred before humans discovered how to grow agricultural foods, so

Paleolithic people were restricted to a hunter-gatherer diet consisting primarily of animals and wild plants.

One of the first books to examine the health benefits of Paleolithic nutrition, particularly as it relates to dental decay, was written in 1939 by Weston A. Price. This book is entitled *Nutrition and Physical Degeneration: A Comparison of Primitive and Modern Diets and Their Effects* (Harper & Brothers, 1939). Another piece of pioneering research on Paleolithic nutrition was written by Dr. Boyd Eaton and Melvin Konner and was published

in 1985. This paper appeared in *The New England Journal of Medicine* and was entitled "Paleolithic Nutrition: A Consideration of Its Nature and Current Implications."

In 1987 Dr. Loren Cordain, a professor at Colorado State University, began researching the field of Paleolithic nutrition. He worked with Dr. Eaton on several research projects about Paleolithic nutrition, and in 2002 Cordain wrote *The Paleo Diet* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

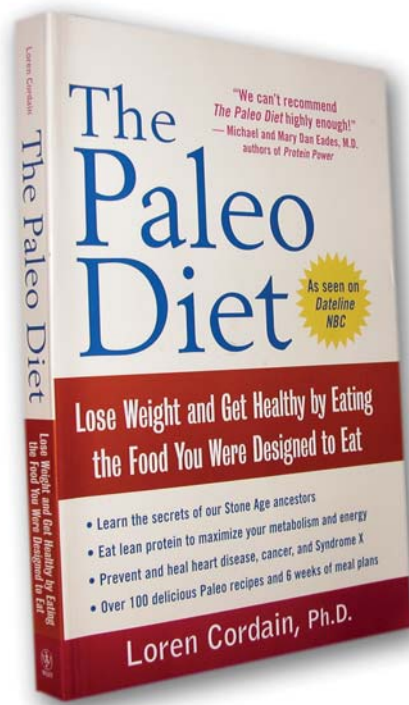
As a followup book to *The Paleo Diet*, Cordain wrote *The Paleo Answer*:

7 Days to Lose Weight, Feel Great, Stay Young (Wiley, December 2011). He says this book is for those who “want to learn more about the Paleo Diet and how it can help them lose weight and improve their health.” In contrast to his first book, *The Paleo Answer* is written more for the lay public and contains more practical information. It also contains testimonials from many individuals who have gotten good results from following the principles of Paleolithic nutrition.

Even a Caveman Can Do It

Many other books have been written recently on what is now known as the Paleo diet. So, what exactly is the Paleo diet in terms of foods available today?

“The Paleo Diet consists of the types of foods every single person on the planet ate prior to the Agricultural Revolution,” says Cordain. “These foods – fresh fruits, vegetables, lean meats and seafood – are high in the beneficial nutrients that promote good health and are low in the foods and nutrients that can contribute to weight gain, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and numerous other health problems.”



Dr. Loren Cordain's 2002 book, *The Paleo Diet*, popularized Paleolithic nutrition.

- to catch one.
- Paleolithic people hardly ever ate cereal grains. This sounds shocking to us today, but for most ancient people, grains were considered starvation food at best.
- Paleolithic people didn't salt their food.
The only concentrated sugar food

nonstarchy wild fruits and vegetables. Consequently, their carbohydrate intake was much lower and their fiber intake much higher than is available from the typical modern diet.

The primary fats in the Paleolithic diets were healthful monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and omega-3 fats – not the saturated fats and trans fats that predominate in modern diets.

Some critics of the Paleolithic diet argue that human genetics have changed since the Stone Age to adapt to the development of agriculture. Cordain's response is that the human genome has had insufficient time to adapt to a modern diet.

Cordain's research suggests that most chronic degenerative diseases are a result of the modern diet centered upon foods made from grains. In his research that examined 229 hunter-gatherer diets, Cordain found that 46 percent of the daily calories of the Paleolithic diet came from animals, with no modern grains such as processed wheat products. This is an important fact for women and the elderly, groups that are especially susceptible to serious degenerative bone disorders such as osteoporosis.

“Forty-six percent of the daily calories of the Paleolithic diet came from animals, with no modern grains such as processed wheat products.”

Cordain has devoted almost two decades to studying Paleolithic nutrition in depth; he offers the following overview of the eating habits of our caveman ancestors:

- Paleolithic people ate no dairy food as adults. Imagine how difficult it would be to milk a wild animal, even if you could somehow manage

Paleolithic people ate was honey, when they were lucky enough to find it.

Wild, lean animal foods predominated in Paleolithic diets, so protein intake was quite high by modern standards, while carbohydrate consumption was much lower.

Virtually all of the carbohydrates Paleolithic people ate came from

The issue is that whole grains contain phytate, which is a substance that interferes with the body's ability to absorb the calcium, iron and zinc that are found in whole grains. Further, Cordain points out that whole grains produce high levels of acid that cause the body to excrete through the urine much of the calcium consumed in the



Chloe VanTussenbroek and Jessi Butterfield were elite gymnasts who also competed in national weightlifting competitions, representing Team BFS. Both athletes had to adhere to sound nutritional programs to maintain optimal body fat levels to achieve their high levels of success.

diet. “For these reasons, an agriculture-based diet can lead to an increased incidence of bone mineral disorders.”

Although dairy products are a staple in most American diets, Cordain is highly critical of milk products.

disaster when adult humans consume a food intended only for the young of another species.”

Because fats make up a large percentage of the Paleo diet due to the emphasis on meat, there is a concern

Paleolithic nutrition and want to take the next step, consult Cordain’s two practical nutrition books: *The Paleo Diet Cookbook* and a book written primarily for endurance athletes, *The Paleo Diet for Athletes*, which Cordain

Wild, lean animal foods predominated in Paleolithic diets, so protein intake was quite high by modern standards, while carbohydrate consumption was much lower.

“Milk is designed to make young animals grow rapidly and to prime their immune systems and prevent disease by allowing hormones and other substances in their mothers’ milk to enter their bloodstream. This is a brilliant evolutionary strategy to encourage survival for young suckling animals at the beginning of their lives, but it is a formula for

that such a diet could promote heart disease and high blood cholesterol. Cordain says there is no reason to worry. “The types of meats permitted on the Paleo Diet are lean meats trimmed of visible fat. These meats are healthful because they have nutritional characteristics similar to wild animals.”

If you’re sold on the theory of

co-authored with Joe Friel. An article about Friel – “The Evolution of Endurance Sports” – appeared in the March/April 2008 issue of *BFS* magazine.

Guess if there’s one thing that’s certain about the eating habits of our Stone Age ancestors it’s that good nutrition never goes out of style! **BFS**