

NERDFitness
PRESENTS

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO THE

PALEO DIET



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Design: Blakkbox Design Studio

Fonts Used: Museo Sans & Chunk

Font Foundries:
exljbris Font Foundry &
The League of Moveable Type

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A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO THE PALEO DIET

My name is Steve Kamb, I run NerdFitness.com, I hate counting calories.

I don't like keeping track of how much I've eaten or obsessing over how many grams of a particular nutrient I've had. Not only do I hate counting calories, but I know that calories are really only half of the battle, as they're not all created equal—400 calories of Doritos do NOT affect your body in the same way as 400 calories of high-quality vegetables and protein.

Fortunately, if you can expand your horizons and remove certain types of food from your diet, you can stop worrying about counting calories FOREVER (sorry, the Count—ah ah ah). I'd love to suggest a particular type of eating that doesn't require counting a single calorie. Oh,

and it will help you lose weight, build muscle, and get in the best shape of your life.

I know, that sounds like an ad for some really shady supplement or diet book that you'd see on TV at 4 AM. It's not, it works. It's helped many people achieve jaw-dropping transformations, including my friend Saint (whose [story you can read here](#)).

I'm talking about the Paleo Diet.

The Paleo Diet is an effort to eat like we used to back in the day... WAY back in the day. If a caveman couldn't eat it, neither can you.

Cue the [Baltimora!](#)

SO, HOW DOES THE PALEO DIET WORK?



SAINT'S PALEO TRANSFORMATION

Oh lord, another "diet." I know, it sounds like a marketing ploy, but it's actually quite legit. You see, tens of

thousands of years ago, before Nike, Cap'n Crunch, and Healthy Choice meals, our ancient ancestors thrived as hunter-gatherers. Although it's been a really long time, our genetics haven't changed that much since then.

The average Homo Sapien back then: muscular, agile, athletic, and incredibly versatile.

The average Homo Sapien now: overweight, out of shape, stressed out, unhappy, sleep deprived and dying from a myriad of preventable diseases.

So what the hell happened? Agriculture! A few thousand years ago humans discovered farming, the agricultural revolution took off, and we advanced from hunter-gatherers to farmers. We settled down, formed societies, and the human race progressed to what we are today. The problem is, our bodies never adjusted properly to eating all the grains that we we're now farming. As Robb Wolf puts it, think of a 100-yard football field. The first



99.5 yards are how long Homo-Sapiens spent as hunter-gatherers. As they became REALLY good at hunting and gathering our bodies adapted to that lifestyle over thousands of years. That last half-yard represents our species after the agricultural revolution, where our diet has shifted (but our genetics haven't).

So, instead of loading up on meat, vegetables and seasonal fruits, we've become a species "dependent" upon grains—bread, pasta, rice, corn, and so on. The government continues to recommend 6–11 servings of grains a day, and people continue to get fatter and fatter by the day.

*66% of us are overweight, 33% are considered obese, and those numbers are only **getting worse**.*

Clearly something's not right.

The Paleo Diet is an effort to go back to eating how we're

biologically designed to eat, allowing us to tap into our genetic potential and start living healthier immediately.

WTF IS THE PALEO DIET?



Back in the day, grains weren't part of our diet. We ate what we could hunt or find—meats, fish, nuts, leafy greens, regional veggies, and roots, and seeds.

No grains.

As Mark from [Mark's Daily Apple](#) points out in his

"definitive guide to grains" article: grains cause kind of a funky response in our system. Grains are composed of carbohydrates, and those carbs are turned into glucose (a type of sugar) in our system to be used for energy and various other tasks to help our body function—any glucose that isn't used as energy is stored as fat.

Rather than me explain that part with thousands of words, just watch this three-minute video—["Why You Got Fat."](#)

Most grains contain stuff called gluten and lectins. What are they and what's wrong with them? I'm so glad you asked:

Gluten is a protein found in things like rye, wheat, and barley. It's now being said that much of our population may be gluten-intolerant (hence all the new "gluten-free!" items popping up everywhere). Over time, those who are gluten intolerant can develop a dismal array of medical conditions



from consuming gluten: dermatitis, joint pain, reproductive problems, acid reflux, and more.

Lectins are natural toxins exist within grains to defend against consumption! Yup. Grains have evolved to keep themselves from being eaten by us. These lectins are not a fan of our gastrointestinal tract, prevent the tract from repairing itself from normal wear and tear. This can cause all kinds of damage.

As Mark so eloquently puts it in his article: “grains are unhealthy at best, and flat-out dangerous at worst.”

The Paleo Diet also almost completely eradicates sugar. Unless you're getting your sugar from a fruit, forget it. Sugar causes an energy spike and crash in your system, turns to fat unless it's used immediately, and wreaks all kind of havoc on our bodies.

Unfortunately, those “low-fat” meals that are loaded with sugar—processed foods are what's making you fat.

So, no grains, no sugar, no processed foods. Many studies have shown that an incredible number of diseases and lifestyle issues can be reversed with these three simple changes. Take a look at this [Time Magazine article](#) on cancer patients who switched to a zero-sugar diet and saw positive results.

BUT WHERE'S MY ENERGY?



So, if we're not eating 300+ grams of carbs every day, where are we supposed to get our energy from?

Our bodies are designed to operate on a lower amount of carbohydrates than what we're used to eating, so less carbs isn't an issue. When there is an absence of carbs (which is how we're USED to operating), our body will

take stored fat and burn THAT for energy in a process called **ketogenesis**.

What I'm trying to tell you is that our bodies are pretty effin' efficient.

So, less carbs equals less glucose in your system, which means your body will have to start burning fat as your fuel source. Win!

SO ALL CARBS ARE BAD?



Nope. Carbs still serve a purpose in our diets, but they're not essential (check out the [Inuit Paradox](#) for a great read on societies that exist without almost any carbohydrates). I prefer to get my carbs from vegetables, sweet potatoes, and fruit. Why is that? These foods are naturally occurring in the wild and don't need to be processed in any way (unlike grains) in order to be consumed.

The other great thing about vegetables is that it is incredibly difficult to eat too many of them. They're incredibly nutrient dense and calorie light – six servings of broccoli (and who would eat 6 servings at once?) has 180 calories and only 36 grams of carbs. A single serving of pasta (and NOBODY eats just one, tiny serving of pasta) has 200 calories and 42 grams of carbs.

WHAT ABOUT DAIRY?



Dairy's a tough one, as most paleo folks tend to stay away from it—a portion of the world is lactose intolerant, and those that aren't often have some type of an aversion to it. Why is that? Because no other animal in the entire kingdom drinks milk beyond infancy, especially the milk of another species! Hunter-gatherers didn't lug cows around with them while traveling – milk was consumed as during the early years of a human's life, and that was it.

As with grains, our bodies just weren't designed for massive dairy consumption, especially as we get older.

[Here's a great read on the benefits/criticisms of dairy.](#)

Personally, I'm split on dairy, as I can drink whole milk without any sort of issue and I consider adding it back into my diet when I need to get enough calories to bulk up.



SO NO GRAINS, NO DAIRY: WHAT DO I GET EAT ON THIS DIET?

Okay, so if we cut out the grains, almost all processed foods, and dairy, you're left with only things that occur naturally:

Meat: GRASS-FED, if possible. Grain causes the same problem in animals as they do in humans.

Fowl: Chicken, duck, hen, turkey...things with wings that (try to) fly.

Fish: Wild fish, as mercury and other toxins can be an issue in farmed fish

Eggs: Look for Omega-3 enriched eggs.

Vegetables: As long as they're not deep-fried, eat as many as you want.

Oils: Olive oil, coconut oil, avocado oil – think natural.

Fruits: Have natural sugar, and can be higher in calories, so limit if you're trying to lose weight.

Nuts: High in calories, so they're good for a snack, but don't eat bags and bags of them.

Tuber: Sweet potatoes and yams. Higher in calories and carbs, so these are good for right after a workout to replenish your glycogen levels.

Steak with asparagus and sweet potato fries, grilled chicken salad, massive omelets that will fill you up for the whole morning, apples dipped in almond butter (my favorite snack ever), and so on. Try it, you'll feel better and healthier.

HOW COME I WON'T GET FAT?



Because the Paleo foods listed above are so nutritious and filling, it's almost impossible to overeat.

To get the equal number of calories from a bag of Doritos or bread (which, as you know, you can eat all day long

and never really feel full), you'd have to eat 2-3 Mack trucks full of broccoli and spinach. Okay, that's clearly an over-exaggeration, but you get the point. A GIANT plate of vegetables and a reasonable portion of meat can keep you full for hours, while eating carb-heavy foods can result in being hungry again soon after.

Whenever I need to lose weight for vacation, I go 100% Paleo and I can drop a few body fat percentage points in a few weeks (while combining it with **strength training** and **interval running**).

I like success.

BUT I CAN'T GIVE UP MY (MUFFIN, PASTA, BAGEL, PIZZA, BREAD)!



Okay then, don't try the Paleo Diet! Simple as that.

If you're happy with how you look, your energy levels are good all day, and you don't see any room for improvement, then keep doing what you're doing—I won't force you to eat like this. However, if you've been struggling with weight loss, have no energy throughout the day, need eight cups of coffee, hate counting calories,

and want to start turning your life around today, why not give it a shot for 30 days?

JUST TRY IT: If after 30 days you haven't noticed a marked improvement in your quest for a better life, then go back to the donuts. It's important to give yourself a full 30 days before passing judgment. Your body has to adjust from fueling itself on carbs and sugar to burning your stored fat for energy, which can take a few weeks.

If you're not willing to cut out grains from your diet completely, work on MINIMIZING those foods gradually and see how your body adjusts. Slow transitions are often much easier to handle over the long-term; the more you can shift your diet closer to Paleo principles, the faster you'll start to see results.

HOW MUCH SHOULD I EAT OF EACH NUTRIENT?



Keep it simple: Try to get a really good protein source with each meal (eggs, steak, chicken, fish, pork) with each meal along with some vegetables or fruit. That's it. If you're having trouble getting enough calories daily, add some healthy fats to the equation: avocado, a handful of almonds or walnuts, almond butter, olive oil, etc.

Now, fruit does have quite a bit of sugar in it, and nuts have quite a few calories...so if you are following the Paleo Diet but not losing weight, check your fruit and nut consumption and see if you are loading up on those at the expense of vegetables and healthy protein.

What I'm trying to say is this: Don't be afraid to make fat a decent portion of your diet.

BAAAAACK UP: I THOUGHT FAT MADE YOU FAT?



Pooooooooor fat. It's gotten a bad rap over the past number of decades, so companies have been doing everything possible to make everything low fat and "healthy!" (while adding all sorts of preservatives, chemicals, and sugar). Yup...cut out the fat, increase the carbs....and look where THAT has gotten us.

Why has fat been vilified? Rather than get into the politics of it myself, I'll let Gary Taubes, author of the incredibly thorough and well-researched **Good Calories, Bad Calories** take over. Here's an article he wrote for the New York Times a decade ago: **What if its all Been a Big Fat Lie?** Take the 15 minutes to read that article – it could radically redefine your thinking on fat and carbohydrates.

So, feel free to eat healthy fats, and stop buying 'low fat' garbage.

DO I NEED TO EAT EVERY THREE HOURS?



Nope. Eat when you're hungry, don't eat when you're not. Going again back to our evolutionary history, we didn't always have the luxury of going to a vending machine or drive-through window to pick up food. Sometimes we'd go all day long, or even days at a time, without finding any food. Luckily, we're designed to use our excess fat stores as energy in these situations.

Don't worry about eating every three hours—our metabolisms aren't that smart.

Sometimes, it's even okay to skip a meal or two, as long as you don't go berserk and eat 7 pizzas because you're so hungry afterward.

*This type of eating is generally referred to as **Intermittent Fasting**.*



WHAT ARE THE CRITICISMS OF THIS DIET?

The main criticism that I continue to come across is that it's "fear mongering" and vilifying grains in the same way that fats have been vilified.

If you really want to drive yourself mad, go spend 30 minutes reading the comments on Tim Ferriss and Robb Wolf's [highly entertaining article about the Paleo Diet](#)—it's a bunch of dietitians yelling back and forth at each other citing different studies and sources and then calling each other wackjobs.

If you're not careful, this type of diet can get expensive. But as we know, with a little research, we can make [eating healthy incredibly affordable](#). Admittedly, while I recommend eating organic fruits and veggies, free range

chicken, and grass-fed beef, these products can be a bit more expensive in conventional stores due to the processes needed to get them there. If you can't afford grass-fed beef, do the best you can and just get the normal kind.

However, farmers' markets often have well-priced meats, eggs, fruits, and vegetables that are locally grown and incredibly healthy. Even if you're spending a little more money than before, when you factor in your overall health, spending a few extra bucks on healthier food now is a wiser investment than thousands later on costly medical expenses.

It's tough to eat Paleo in today's society! A normal breakfast in the US consists of bagels, muffins, toast, cereal, or donuts. NONE of those things have any nutritional value, they're loaded with tons of carbs and calories, and are composed of processed grains that can jack up your stomach. Eating out at restaurants can get

tough, and “paleo-approved” is not something you’ll usually find on a menu. Eating in this manner requires careful planning and tons of willpower, but it can be done if you’re dedicated.

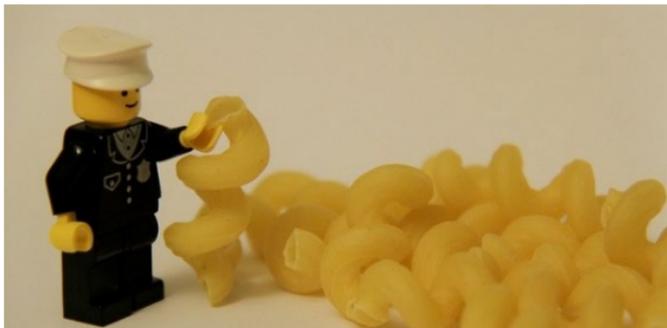
“But cavemen had short lifespans! We live way longer now”—I agree with you here, but only because you don’t have to deal with the dangers of living back then. Give those hunter-gatherers access to modern technology and medicine and I bet their lifespan would easily surpass ours.

Lastly, there are those that claim that all of this “we’re not designed to eat grains” stuff is garbage—that plenty of societies around the world consume grains and aren’t fat and unhealthy like us. [The China Study](#) is frequently cited when criticizing the Paleo Diet—[here are some essays, reviews, and a debate](#) between the author of the Paleo Diet and the author of the China Study that might help you reach a decision. And for more on the Paleo Diet

debate from Nerd Fitness, check out this article about the [debunking of the Paleo Diet](#), and this one on a how to go [“Paleo-ish.”](#)

“But this is just a meat diet, and eating all meat is bad!” First of all, consider your sources and **do your research** before jumping to the conclusions. Next, this is not an all meat diet or zero carb diet like Atkins. The biggest component of the Paleo Diet? Vegetables! Every meal in a true Paleo diet has a moderate amount of healthy (properly raised chicken, grass-fed beef, hormone free, etc.) meat combined with nutritious veggies or a moderate amount of fruit.

MEH, I'M STILL NOT CONVINCED



The human body is so incredibly complex that I doubt we'll ever have a definitive answer on the best possible diet. This one might sound like a fad to you, or it's too restrictive, complicated, etc.

All I ask is that you try it for 30 days before passing judgment.

I could cite sources about how the Paleo Diet has changed people's lives or even saved [this Doctor's life](#) (must watch!), but instead I just ask you to try it and then judge for yourself.

Take 30 days and give it a shot—cut out the grains and dairy, start eating more vegetables and fruits, eat more humanely raised and non-grain fed meat, cut out the liquid calories and sugar, and see how you feel after the month is up. If you're analytical and want numbers to use in your final verdict, get your blood work done at the beginning and end of the month.

Take a picture of yourself now, and then another 30 days from now.

I bet you'll be surprised.

WHAT DOES STEVE THINK ABOUT THE PALEO DIET?



I'm a fan of the Paleo Diet because it makes logical sense to me. I know we existed as a species 150,000 years ago, I know the agricultural revolution didn't happen until 10,000 years ago, which means we had 140,000 years

without grains. In that time we learned to thrive as a species without grains (or else we wouldn't be here).

The other reason I'm a fan is because you can eat what you want (provided it's paleo), when you want, and eat a lot more than if you were eating processed grains (while still eating a caloric deficit!). Eat a huge breakfast, skip lunch, and a big dinner. Eat a small breakfast, two snacks, and then dinner. Do whatever makes you happy and fits in your schedule. I like this kind of stress-free eating.

Finally, I love the Paleo diet because it removes emotion and "I'll just have one" from the equation. No longer do you have to use incredible willpower to only eat one cookie, or have half a serving of pasta. Instead, if you have a list of foods that you can eat, and a list of foods that you can't eat. It's very black and white and very easy to follow. "Nope, can't eat it. It's not Paleo!"

Regardless of whether or not grains should be vilified, I



love this diet because I know it WORKS. I know people that have lost incredible amounts of weight and changed their lives within a matter of months.

The diet portion of the [Nerd Fitness Academy](#), our online fitness course, and the diet cheat sheet from [Nerd Fitness Yoga](#), is designed around the Paleo Diet (allowing people to ease into it) because I know it works. The diet portions of the [Rebel Strength Guide](#) and the [Rebel Running Guide](#) are also grounded in paleo principles because that's how strongly I believe in it.

Regardless of how you feel about grains, I think we can all agree that eating more natural foods and less processed foods is better for you.

OK, I'M INTRIGUED, WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFO?



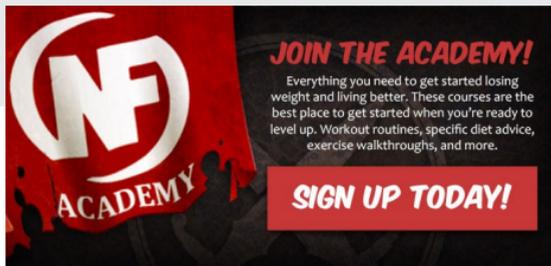
If you're looking to read more about the Paleo Diet, I have a few resources to recommend. The main links are free resources, the indented links are books available for sale on Amazon.

Mark's Daily Apple: Easily the most comprehensive resource on the Internet for the Paleo Diet—Mark writes an article every weekday about everything Paleo, and it usually blows me away. Some of the posts can get overwhelming, so I suggest starting with his *Primal Blueprint 101*.

The Primal Blueprint: If you want to read about this stuff in a book rather than on a computer screen, Mark's book *The Primal Blueprint* is a fantastic place to get started on not only what to eat, but why you should be eating it. It's educational, funny, real-world applicable, and teaches you how to primalize (just made that up) the rest of your life too.

Loren Cordain: Loren is considered the leading expert on the Paleo Diet—Robb (below) is actually one of his students/disciples/padawans. Dr. Cordain is probably the foremost authority on this type of eating, which is why I really enjoyed reading both of his books.

The Rebel Fitness Guide: Yup, tooting my own horn here. I'm a fan of the Paleo diet, but i know it can be intimidating, so I've created a diet philosophy that allows you to slowly ease into the Paleo lifestyle. I still include resources for vegans and vegetarians if that's your thing, but I focused on making this whole "diet" thing enjoyable and educational.



Robb Wolf: Another great resource, and a guy I've already referenced in this article multiple times. Check out his site for a **comprehensive FAQ** on all things Paleo, a **shopping list PDF** (right-click and save), and plenty of humor.

The Paleo Solution: Robb's book seriously had me laughing out loud at certain points—not bad for a book on diet! It is a little less forgiving than Mark's book above, but it's still a great read.

PALEO RECIPES?



So you're ready to eat Paleo, but you don't know how to cook anything, huh? Have no fear, the Internet is a wonderful place.

Mark's Daily Apple: Although he sells the cookbook on Amazon, Mark also lists over 100 free primal recipes on

his site. Pick something on the list, go buy the ingredients, and follow the instructions! So easy even a caveman can do it.

Everyday Paleo: Great pictures, easy to follow recipes, and pretty interesting combinations. Click on FOOD in the Nav bar, and the meals are broken down into breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Easy Caveman Cookbook: A great resource written by Vic Magary if you're looking for some quick and easy Paleo meals. Definitely worth the \$2.99.

Nerd Fitness: Start with a Nerd Fitness approved basic Paleo meal or move on to something more fun like Paleo spaghetti.



EASING INTO IT

Maybe you're ready to try out this Paleo lifestyle, but you can't commit fully—there are certain foods you refuse to give up, or you can't afford to buy grass-fed beef at the moment. That's okay! If you can even make a few small changes here and there (cut out liquid calories, switch out your rice for steamed vegetables, cut back on bread, etc) you'll start to see some changes. Remember, 20% healthier is better than 0% healthier—as you get more comfortable with the changes you can increase that percentage.

One method (the one I like) is the 80% method—eat really well during the week (all paleo), and then give yourself a day on the weekend to eat whatever you want—pizza, ice cream, cheeseburgers, bagels, etc. Get it out of your system on that one day, and then get back on track the next day.

For some people this helps them stay on track, when for others it can be derailing. That will be up to you.

Get rid of the temptation—if you're gonna go at this thing with a full head of steam, remove all the junk food from your house. It's going to take a few weeks for your body to adjust to burning fat instead of glucose, and you might want to eat poorly here and there. If there's no food in your house to tempt you, it will be much easier to stay on target.

Remember, in the Nerd Fitness Academy, we've created a step by step way to slowly ease into the Paleo Diet,

using baby steps that make the transition not only easier, but seem like you're not making any changes at all.



WHAT ARE YOUR EXPERIENCES OR THOUGHTS?

Your turn.

Have you tried the Paleo Diet? What was your experience like? Have a criticism of the diet that I didn't cover before? Do you have another paleo recipe resource? [Join the discussion on NerdFitness.com!](#)

All I ask is that you keep the debate civil—let's have a good clean discussion with facts, citations, sources, and personal experiences..

One more thing: this is meant to be a primer for discussion. Before you rip me to shreds for a ridiculous reason, read a few of the resources I listed above and make an informed decision based on your observances.

Remember, one of the major **Rules of the Rebellion** is to question everything!



ABOUT NERD FITNESS AND STEVE KAMB



My name is Steve and I started NerdFitness.com back in 2009. Since then, it has evolved from “a boy and his blog” into a community of THOUSANDS of desk jockeys, nerds, and Average Joes all over the world working together to level up their lives.

*We’d love for you to join our Rebellion. **Here’s what we stand for.***

I hope to see you around the community. Now go eat something healthy and pick up something heavy!

For the REBELLION!!!

-Steve Kamb, NerdFitness.com

If you’re interested in joining us, the best ways to stay connected are listed below:

*Sign up for **free updates**: Two articles a week plus exclusive content just for subscribers.*

*Join us on the **Nerd Fitness Message Boards** – 40,000+ Rebels and growing daily.*

*Be a fan of **Nerd Fitness on Facebook**: Even my mom is a fan, so you KNOW it’s cool.*

*Follow me on **Twitter**: I dish out daily doses of rebel wisdom along with links to ridiculous things I find.*

Photo Sources:

Cavemen elephant hunt, darth vader vendor, lego bread and carbs, milk truck lego, caveman with wheel, lego muffin, storm trooper tomato, chef and lego pig, lego clock, lego man with pasta, lego caveman forging for food, lego explorer, lego cook.





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