



Paleo diet has pros and cons

A lot of my friends seem to be trying the Paleo diet these days. Is the diet safe and sound?

Most mainstream nutritionists hesitate giving their stamp of approval to any diet that eliminates entire food groups from the menu, and that's what this diet does. But it can offer some benefits.

For anyone who has been, well, living in a cave since this diet debuted, here are the basics: The Paleolithic diet, which also goes by names like the Caveman diet or the Stone Age diet, purports that the human body is programmed to respond well to a diet much like the one eaten by our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Details vary among proponents, but, for the most part, "in" foods include fresh meat, fish and shellfish, poultry, eggs, fats (including lard), vegetables (some versions allow potatoes), and fruit. "Out" are salt, sugar, processed foods, dairy foods, beans and other legumes, and grains — even whole grains.

You can probably see where this is going.

You'd be hard-pressed to find a nutrition professional who would shed a tear at eliminating processed foods, salt and sugar from the diet. And they would delight at the emphasis on vegetables, fruit, fish, lean meat and other whole foods.

But many question the injunctions against dairy, legumes and whole grains. While Paleo diet supporters blame these foods for food allergies, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer

and a long list of other afflictions, mainstream nutritionists can point to study after study showing that these foods are beneficial parts of a normal, healthy diet. Plus, they doubt that most people could stick with the restrictive diet for very long.

In addition, the heavy emphasis on protein is a source of concern for some. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that protein intake be anywhere from 10 percent to 35 percent of calories. Those following the Paleo diet could easily go over the top of that range, which could overload the kidneys. Similarly, the diet's lack of concern about saturated fat tends to raise eyebrows.

Still, if you're trying to lose weight, the Paleo diet has shown promise, primarily in small studies published in European journals. And a 2010 study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* involving nearly 800 people showed that a high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet with a low glycemic index, similar to the Paleo diet, helped subjects lose more weight and keep it off. Still, other studies have shown that it's calorie restriction overall and the ability to stick to a diet that truly make the difference.

It's important to remember that different diets affect different people in different ways. But if you decide to try the Paleo diet or make other extreme changes to your usual food intake, first see your doctor.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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