

"Dr. Akil Palanisamy makes both timeless knowledge and leading-edge research accessible in this groundbreaking and timely book....a must-read for anyone serious about achieving optimal health and vitality."

—ANDREW WEIL, M.D.,

world-renowned integrative medicine physician and bestselling author

# THE PALEOVEDIC DIET



A Complete Program to  
Burn Fat, Increase Energy, and  
Reverse Disease

Akil Palanisamy, MD

# PRAISE FOR *THE PALEOVEDIC DIET*

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“Integrative medicine expert Dr. Akil Palanisamy makes both timeless knowledge and leading-edge research accessible in this groundbreaking and timely book. *The Paleovedic Diet* is rich with useful information on such diverse issues as gluten sensitivity, the human microbiome, detoxification in modern times and the rise of autoimmune disease. *The Paleovedic Diet* is a must-read for anyone serious about achieving optimal health and vitality.”

—Andrew Weil, MD, world-renowned integrative medicine physician and bestselling author

“The Paleovedic Diet represents the best of integrative medicine, combining ancient wisdom with modern science and functional medicine to create a definitive roadmap to health. In an engaging and easy to read style, Dr. Akil presents the most up-to-date, evidence-based health information available today. He sheds light on topics such as optimal nutrition, the 100 trillion bacteria that make up your microbiome, the best way to exercise, and powerful detox practices. He reveals the hidden healing power of spices and shows you how to use Ayurveda to customize a diet that’s best for you. *The Paleovedic Diet* can help you lose weight, increase energy, and reverse disease.”

—Mark Hyman, MD, eight-time #1 *New York Times*–bestselling author and functional medicine expert

“Dr. Akil deftly weaves the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda together with the principles of a nutrient-dense Paleolithic diet to create a practical, individualized approach to wellness. If you’ve been looking for a way of eating and living that is tailored especially for your body and mind, this book is for you.”

—Chris Kresser, LAc, *New York Times*–bestselling author of *The Paleo Cure*

“An impressively powerful intersection between East, West, and Ancestral Health. *The Paleovedic Diet* gives you a comprehensive guide to optimal health that integrates time-tested recommendations from ancient cultures along with the hard modern science that backs up their efficacy. Every page is chock full of invaluable, evidence-based guidelines on how to individualize your health plan for success. It’s a truly impressive collection of information.”

—Mark Sisson, *New York Times*–bestselling author of *The Primal Blueprint*

“In *The Paleovedic Diet*, Dr. Akil integrates his extensive clinical experience, the latest scientific research, and the most effective aspects of the Paleo diet with Ayurveda, the time-tested traditional medical system of India. He has created an enlightening, customizable, and easily actionable roadmap to optimal health that will open your eyes. *The Paleovedic Diet* has changed my approach to healthy living—and it will change yours, too.”

—Michelle Tam, *New York Times*–bestselling author of *Nom Nom Paleo: Food For Humans*

“*The Paleovedic Diet* is a powerful synthesis of the healing wisdom of a thousand years of ancient medicine and the precision and clear thinking of the best of scientific method. In elegant and easily accessible language, Dr. Akil Palanisamy makes available to us a wealth of previously unknown information about ourselves and the resolution of our most common problems. It is impossible to read this book without finding something in it that will heal you. A brilliant contribution to the health of every one of us.”

—Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, *New York Times*–bestselling author of *Kitchen Table Wisdom* and *My Grandfather’s Blessings*

“If you have been increasingly confused about what to eat, this is the book for you! Dr. Akil provides sage and easy to follow middle way that blends the best of medical science with the wisdom of ancestral traditions.”

—Victoria Maizes, MD, Executive Director, Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine

“Dr. Akil has beautifully blended the ancient, timeless wisdom of Ayurveda and Ayurvedic principles of healing with the light of modern medicine, integrated so that anyone can use it for his or her total healing.”

—Vasant Lad, BAMS, internationally recognized Ayurvedic physician, author of *Ayurveda: Science of Self-Healing*

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Dr. Akil Palanisamy, M.D.

Foreword by Robb Wolf



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*To my beloved wife, Aiswarya, and my beautiful daughter, Alisha—you have brought so  
much light, joy, and love into my life. You are everything to me.*

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# DISCLAIMER

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This book is intended to provide information for educational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose or treat any medical condition or illness. It is not a substitute for diagnosis and treatment prescribed by a health-care professional. If you suspect that you have a medical problem, consult a licensed health-care provider to diagnose and treat your condition. Any use of vitamins, herbs, or any nutritional supplements should be under the supervision of a trained practitioner. The author and publisher specifically disclaim any liability or loss, personal or otherwise, incurred as a consequence of the application of any of the contents of this book. Mention of specific companies or organizations in this book does not imply endorsement by the author or publisher.



# FOREWORD

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“What’s right for me?” It’s a question I hear all the time. Personalizing the vast health information out there to find out what’s best for you has been a challenge until now. *The Paleovedic Diet* provides the solution. Dr. Akil Palanisamy has integrated the latest medical research with powerful ancient wisdom to help you create a customized diet and lifestyle plan.

*The Paleovedic Diet* contains much of interest to a broad spectrum of people, ranging from Paleo aficionados to serious biohackers to innocent newbies—indeed to anyone who is really serious about optimizing his or her health. This book can help you to lose weight, boost your energy and vitality, and begin to reverse any health challenges you might be facing. “Dr. Akil” does the heavy lifting for you by reviewing and summarizing the scientific literature. There is no other physician in the world more qualified than Dr. Akil to give you accurate and reliable health information, based on his extensive experience treating thousands of complex patients.

This captivating book will take you on a whirlwind journey through a wide range of fascinating topics. In Part One, *The Paleovedic Diet* spotlights health-promoting secrets of long-lived societies and traditional cultures. Dr. Akil addresses every major question you might have about nutrition and dispels myths about grains and gluten, protein, good and bad fats, and exactly which fruits and vegetables to eat. He reviews the latest research about the microbiome and tells you how to optimize this vital but important but neglected human organ. He includes an impressive evidence-based review of spices, which are an incredible source of nutrients, phytochemicals, and other healing compounds that those in the Paleo world should take advantage of.

Part Two of the book covers all other important aspects of health besides nutrition. Ayurveda, which could seem esoteric, is explained in clear and practical terms to help you to understand your biochemistry, your individuality and develop a personalized diet and lifestyle program that’s right for you. Dr. Akil also discusses the importance of a daily routine, intermittent fasting, physical activity, optimal sleep, stress reduction, and balance of your mind-body connection.

In Part Three, Dr. Akil addresses a topic that is often overlooked in the Paleo realm: detoxification. He reviews startling research about the role of environmental toxins and strategies for reducing these toxins. He has created a powerful three-week detoxification protocol called *The Paleovedic Detox*, which can jumpstart your digestion, improve your elimination of toxins and pollutants, and help you heal from illness.

You don’t have to settle for feeling bad, just getting by, or blaming your issues on getting old. You don’t have to settle for anything less than perfect health. *The Paleovedic Diet* empowers you with the information and tools to take charge of your health and thrive. This user-friendly program has the potential to change many lives for the better, especially yours. The invitation is open—start feeling better today!

—Robb Wolf, *New York Times*–bestselling author of *The Paleo Solution*

# INTRODUCTION

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## A Sobering Reality

We're in a crisis of health. Two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese, despite spending over \$5 billion a year on diet and weight-loss products. More than 100 million Americans suffer from various problems with blood sugar, ranging from mild insulin resistance to prediabetes to full-blown type 2 diabetes; by 2020, this will affect half of all Americans.<sup>1</sup> Fifty million Americans now suffer from allergies of some type.<sup>2</sup> Food allergies are especially troubling, affecting up to 10 percent of the population in some countries; rates are soaring worldwide as demonstrated by studies in the United States, United Kingdom, China, and Australia.<sup>3</sup>

Autoimmune disease, perhaps the most rapidly growing type of chronic disease, was virtually unknown a century ago and yet already afflicts one in ten Americans.<sup>4</sup> Celiac disease, an autoimmune disease characterized by gluten sensitivity, has increased in prevalence by 500 percent in the past fifty years.<sup>5</sup> Autoimmune type 1 diabetes has also increased by 500 percent since 1950 in certain countries such as Finland.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, we spend more as a country on health care than we've ever spent before. The amount we spend per person per year on health care, over \$8,200, is the highest of any country in the world, and nearly three times more than the country that ranks second.<sup>7</sup> We spend around \$3 trillion on health care in the United States, which is over 17 percent of GDP, the highest percentage of any country (and rising).

To be fair, the United States is a world leader in medical research and has excellent survival rates in certain diseases, like cancer. However, we still suffer from the highest obesity rates in the world, high chronic disease rates, and below-average life expectancy compared to other industrialized nations. The United States ranks forty-sixth when it comes to infant mortality, coming in behind Europe, Australia, Canada, South Korea, and Cuba.<sup>8</sup>

Even those of us who don't suffer from a diagnosable disease may not feel well. For example, fatigue is a widespread complaint in the United States, reported by 38 percent of people in the US workforce. Nonspecific symptoms like poor digestion, brain fog, and headaches are written off as simply a result of "getting old." All of us have the basic goal of wanting to feel good and to thrive. But I meet many people who have simply given up on this goal. Many patients have come to accept low energy as a fact of life. However, after working with me for some time, they often report spectacular gains in energy and vitality.

## A Return to Basics

So what's the solution? Certainly there are social, political, and financial factors that complicate these issues. While the problem is complex, the solutions in my mind are relatively simple. They involve a return to the basics of human health, updated for the unique challenges of modern society. That's what I'm presenting in this book, based on my clinical work with thousands of patients.

It's difficult to be healthy in today's world because of environmental factors, chronic stress, isolation, and lack of community, the ready availability of processed foods, and changes in our food supply. It's also hard because of the explosion of conflicting, contradictory health information that inundates us from

many sources. But the elements of health are present in our communities and our lives if we know where to look for and what to focus on. If we realize the importance of getting local organic food from the farmers' market, eating a diet that is right for our body type, strengthening our mind-body connection, and moving throughout the day, we could focus more on these factors.

In addition, the body has a remarkable capacity for self-healing if given the right inputs. I see many patients who have been told by other doctors that they cannot get better; however, by working with me, they are often able to heal themselves.

## Myths and Misconceptions

The problem of conflicting advice and misinformation is especially acute in the realm of ancestral diet approaches that, broadly speaking, seek to emulate the dietary patterns of our ancestors. Every day I get questions from my patients about these approaches to eating. And it's clear that it is not just my patients who are interested. The Paleo Diet in particular was the most searched diet on Google worldwide in 2013—it was featured on *The Dr. Oz Show* and has become the diet of choice for people who participate in the massively popular Crossfit program.

But the level of interest in these diets is matched only by the number of myths and misconceptions about them. And with the explosion of books and websites on Paleo, it's hard to sort through the overwhelming amount of information to discern what is true and accurate. Should you eat just bacon and burgers? Since salads didn't exist in the caveman era, should you cut out vegetables? Follow a low-carb diet? (No to all of the above, FYI). It's not surprising that so many people I talk to are very confused about this subject.

## Paleo Must Be Individualized

I see many patients in my clinic who are following a Paleo diet but actually doing themselves some harm inadvertently. This may be due to consuming fewer carbohydrates than they need, not adapting the diet to changing medical conditions or life circumstances, or following a diet that is not ideal for their body type. In my experience, most people eating Paleo don't usually know that they need to customize this diet for themselves. They are always shocked to find out that the way they have been following Paleo could actually be detrimental to their health in some way. For example, eating too much raw food or eating foods that are considered “energetically heating” may be harmful depending on your Ayurvedic body type (for cases illustrating this, see [Chapter 6](#)).

## The Paleovedic Approach

It's one thing to know that “one size fits all” doesn't work in nutrition, but figuring out the diet that is best for you is much harder. To help individualize diets for my patients, I rely on Ayurveda, the five-thousand-year-old traditional medical system from India. In this book, I integrate the core principles of Paleo with the science of Ayurveda to help you determine the optimal, individualized diet for you—the Paleovedic Diet.

As a Harvard-trained M.D., I integrate a strong scientific background in biochemistry and Western medicine with training in Ayurveda and study of ancestral societies around the globe. This unique background enables me to seamlessly blend Paleo and Ayurvedic principles with the latest research in nutrition, food science, and medicine. I provide definitive, practical health information based on cutting-edge research and clinical experience.

In my practice, I incorporate an integrative medicine modality known as functional medicine, which uses specialized lab testing to diagnose and treat imbalances in the function of different organ systems. My approach has benefited thousands of patients who have utilized this approach to improve energy, lose weight, and reverse disease. The Paleovedic Diet provides practical guidelines on how to integrate the seemingly opposed worlds of ancient wisdom and modern science to create a customized nutrition plan for optimal health.

Throughout the book, cases from actual patients I have treated are included (names and identifying details are changed). I want to illustrate how people have been able to achieve radical improvements in health by following the principles discussed in the book.

## How To Use This Book

This book is divided into three parts. We begin by focusing on the health of traditional societies. There are a few areas in the world known as “blue zones,” where populations still enjoy exceptional longevity and good health, such as Loma Linda, California, and Sardinia, Italy. In addition, there are a few populations that still follow a traditional hunter-gatherer diet and lifestyle, such as the Kitava people of Papua New Guinea.

Remarkably, medical analysis has revealed that these populations are relatively free of our modern illnesses like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. What are the common elements shared by these groups? How can we apply lessons from these groups in our everyday lives?

## Part One—Fuel Your Body Optimally

Part One covers in great detail the topic of what you should put into your body, addressing popular misconceptions about ancestral eating. A question I hear frequently in my clinic is “Should I eat meat?” Some argue vehemently in favor of vegetarianism, while others emphasize the importance of animal protein. These conflicting theories are reconciled and clarified. Determining your Ayurvedic body type (which you will do in [Chapter 6](#)) can inform this decision. To me, the Paleo diet is a plant-based diet insofar as most of your plate should be filled with vegetables. Sometimes people don’t realize this, with the popular conception of Paleo as a meat-based diet.

Part One also discusses issues such as optimizing your carb intake, grains and gluten sensitivity, which types of fats are healthiest, in-depth perspectives on protein, unheralded superfoods (you’ll be surprised to see what I’m talking about here), how to heal and repair your digestive tract, and a discussion of your bacterial flora and their many roles.

I then help you further refine and tailor your diet according to your Ayurvedic body type and discuss other valuable insights from Ayurveda. I review twelve powerful healing spices that comprise a veritable pharmacy of disease-fighting power. You will learn about the remarkable healing potential of each spice and get ideas about how to use them in delicious recipes. Revered in Ayurveda as medicinal agents, these spices have been shown by modern research to be loaded with nutrients and phytochemicals that can help prevent or treat more than one hundred different diseases.

## Part Two—Exercise, Sleep, and the Mind-Body-Spirit Balance

Part Two addresses the other aspects of ancestral societies besides nutrition that enable them to be remarkably healthy. Before food was readily available 24/7, our ancestors had to be well-adapted to surviving alternating periods of feast and famine. A technique known as intermittent fasting that mimics

this ancestral pattern of eating has been shown to help your body burn fat, balance hormones, and lose weight. Research on certain modern hunter-gatherer populations has shown that they in fact consume their food in this way.

Learning to move the way our ancestors did is vital to health. I present five secrets of optimal exercise—including a movement approach that mimics the activity pattern of hunter-gatherers in order to dramatically improve one's fitness, and in less time than it takes to do traditional workouts.

Part Two also addresses other elements that contribute to ancestral societies' well-being. This includes common practices of traditional societies that are beneficial, such as following a health-promoting daily routine, getting quality sleep, practicing stress reduction, having a sense of purpose, and maintaining a genuine connection with other people. With each topic, the focus is on simple, practical guidelines that can be implemented immediately to improve quality of life.

## **Part Three—Detoxify to Reach the Next Level of Health**

Part Three focuses on a core element that is often missing in the discussion of ancestral diets—the topic of detoxification. Our ancestors did not have to deal with the level of environmental pollutants and toxins that we are exposed to today. These toxins may contribute to fatigue, frequent infections, inflammation, and a host of other maladies—and you may not even realize that you have them. Through my work with patients, I have found that doing a three-week detoxification program called the “PaleoVedic Detox” can take their health to the next level. This comprehensive program of diet and supplements will help you to reduce inflammation, improve energy, and detoxify.

Next, I cover common environmental toxins that we are all exposed to and may not even know about. I review the disquieting research on these toxins and provide practical suggestions on how to reduce exposures in our foods, homes, and work spaces. Tips on specific foods and practices that support daily detoxification are included. Regular cleansing and detoxification are essential for optimal health.

Part Three concludes with a detailed dietary program that puts together all the concepts from the book. Appendices include a detailed menu, food plan, and recipes by nutritionist Sharon Meyer.

## **Why I Wrote This Book**

I wrote this book for several reasons. First, writing has been a long-standing passion of mine and something that gives me great pleasure. Second, my patients have repeatedly asked me to write a book to describe my unique approach, which has often helped them when nothing else has. Third, I can only see so many patients in clinic each day, and I wanted to make this potentially transformative information available to anyone seeking to take charge of his or her health.

Ultimately, my goal is to present a comprehensive road map to optimal health and detail a practical, sensible, and enlightened approach to living. If enough people take control of their own health and follow a path to optimal wellness, we can alter our trajectory as a society and begin to reverse our modern epidemics of chronic disease.

For additional resources, recipes, tips, personalized support, and more, please visit my website at [www.doctorakil.com](http://www.doctorakil.com). In different parts of the book, I refer you back to the website for specific links and more detailed resources. Online you will also find bonus content that expands on the material featured in this book.

# MY STORY—WHEN MY BODY FAILED ME

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Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers,  
But to be fearless in facing them.  
Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain,  
But for the heart to conquer it.  
Let me not look for allies in life's battlefield,  
But to my own strength.  
Let me not crave in anxious fear to be saved,  
But hope for the patience to win my freedom.  
Grant me that I may not be a coward, feeling your mercy in my success alone,  
But let me find the grasp of your hand in my failure.<sup>1</sup>

—Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel Prize-winning poet from India

I was on top of the world. I was a senior at Harvard University and had been accepted to medical school to pursue my lifelong dream of becoming a doctor. That's when the trouble started. While working on my senior thesis, I noticed severe wrist pain with numbness and tingling in my arms. The pain got worse and began to interfere with my sleep. I could no longer type on a keyboard. I went to student health services and was diagnosed with repetitive strain injury (RSI).

I had worked hard during my college years in classes and research activities, but nothing out of the ordinary. I was used to working hard and had a lot of energy to fuel that work. The previous year, I had become vegetarian. Certainly, I was under stress but managed it with a daily meditation practice. I had a regular routine of gym workouts and yoga. The reason for my illness puzzled me.

I was prescribed anti-inflammatory medication and physical therapy, and was given extra time for writing during exams and help with typing my thesis. My symptoms abated but did not disappear. I was able to finish college and graduate with honors.

I then began medical school at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). My top choice. UCSF was considered the premier medical school on the West Coast, and I was excited to begin. After eight years in Boston, I was eager to escape the snow as well, although the cool climate in San Francisco surprised me. I began to understand the apocryphal quote attributed to Mark Twain, "The coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco."

I completed my first year and was happy, although I was in class all day and studied several hours each night. My symptoms had been manageable with physical therapy but began to worsen when I started my second year. The wrist pain was intolerable at times and was accompanied by back pain that made it impossible to sit for more than fifteen minutes.

Also, a heavy and onerous fatigue began to set in, which I attributed to stress. Inexplicably, I lost thirty pounds over several months from my already lean baseline weight of 138. I could not attend lectures due to worsening back pain and fatigue. I was given extra time for exams, which helped me pass my exams and not flunk out of medical school, but I began to struggle with severe anxiety, which had never bothered me before.

I adapted. I began intensive hand and wrist therapy. I learned to use voice recognition software. The

university provided a foot-operated mouse. I dictated papers and class assignments. I studied at home using textbooks. Eventually, I began to study lying down on my side, the only position that was comfortable for my back. This, unfortunately, led to neck and shoulder pain.

After completing my board exams (eight hours of sitting down and typing answers to questions on a computer), I was afflicted with excruciating pain for three days. Although school had been challenging until then, I was about to start the most difficult part of medical school, the third year. This entailed long hours caring for patients in the hospital, being on overnight calls without sleep every few days, and studying intensely without much time off.

I knew I couldn't do it. I was in a state of deep despair. Here I was, after getting my degree at Harvard pursuing my life's passion of studying medicine at one of the top schools in the country, and I had to stop because my body was failing me. I had been in pain for so long that I wondered if it was even possible for me to get better. I had seen some of the top doctors in the country, gotten the best treatments, but continued to decline. I felt hopeless.

I asked for a leave of absence and was granted a year off. I decided I needed to get to the bottom of my illness. Three years of intensive physical therapy, doctor's visits, and medications had not helped at all. Something was missing.

My parents thought diet was a factor. They thought my becoming vegetarian was causing a problem. I believed this was not true because I ate a ton of fruits and vegetables, and ate tofu and dairy products for protein.

I had given up eating meat for ethical, environmental, and spiritual reasons. I was an active member of the San Francisco vegetarian society, had organized vegetarian events for the university, and was a strong advocate for vegetarianism. I thought that my spiritual growth and meditation practice would be deepened by avoiding meat.

I had been studying Ayurveda, the traditional medicine of India, for a while on the side. I decided to visit a practitioner in San Francisco. She diagnosed me with excess vata (air energy) and low ojas (vitality). She recommended some herbs and spices and dietary modifications. She suggested that I eat for my Ayurvedic body type and also incorporate some nourishing foods.

My path to recovery began with two words: bone broth. The Ayurvedic practitioner recommended it as one of the nourishing foods that could help restore vitality in my depleted body. But I was resistant. I could not eat animal products. I went back and forth about this for a few weeks.

Finally, because I was using animal bones that were about to be discarded, I decided that this did not violate my principles. After a month of daily bone broth, I was about 10 percent better, which was the first time anything had helped in years. Bone broth is rich in minerals and gelatin, which supports digestive health and help reduce inflammation. My recovery from illness began with healing and repair of my gut.

In the story of the Buddha, after practicing an extreme form of asceticism, the Buddha was weak and near death. He was visited by a milkmaid who offered him a little milk. Despite the taboos against this, he decided to accept and eventually recovered his health. He went on to teach about moderation and the Middle Way. I felt I had reached a similar turning point. I questioned everything I thought I knew about health and disease. I decided to keep an open mind. I realized that there was a lot I didn't know about nutrition and alternative therapies.

Next, I explored acupuncture, visiting three different acupuncturists for ten to twelve sessions each. I didn't see much improvement. I tried qigong. I visited energy healers and Reiki practitioners. I deepened my yoga practice. I continued taking herbs. I improved another 20 percent.

Four months of my year off had passed, and I was still not feeling much better. I was becoming

desperate. I decided to experiment with eating meat again. I was deeply conflicted about this after three years of vegetarianism. However, I was willing to try anything to recover my health, because I knew that I could not fulfill my dream of becoming a doctor without a healthy body.

One day I stopped by the UCSF cafeteria and bought a chicken sandwich. I went to an empty classroom where I could eat mindfully. Before eating, I prayed for some sort of sign or clue to let me know if I was doing the right thing.

Eating the sandwich was uneventful. But, as I was chewing the last mouthful of chicken, I bit into something hard. Surprised, I pulled the morsel out of my mouth and realized that it was a tiny rolled-up piece of paper. I unfurled it and saw that it had a word on it. The word was RATION.

I was puzzled. I decided to try to make some sense of this and just think about what the word might mean. To me, a ration was something scarce and valuable consumed during a time of need. Perhaps the message was that I needed a small amount of meat in my diet to get better. To this day, I don't know how that piece of paper got into my sandwich. It's a mystery.

I then meditated on the decision for several days. I realized that perhaps I should try eating meat for a while to see how I felt. My Ayurvedic practitioner agreed with this and explained that certain body types may do better with animal protein. In fact, she had wanted me to eat meat after our first visit. However, she started me initially with bone broths because she sensed I would be more open to that at the beginning, based on my strong ethical convictions.

The improvements were significant. I began eating more protein with each meal and consumed meat regularly. I also ate more eggs. Within two months, I had less pain, had more energy, and had regained some of the weight I had lost.

I then met a holistic chiropractor in Oakland who practiced a form of functional medicine. Although I didn't really understand or believe in what he was doing, at that point I was open to trying anything.

Remarkably, I began to improve right away. The imbalances identified and treated using a functional medicine approach were fundamental to helping me heal fully. Fixing these issues was the final piece of the puzzle. I responded well to holistic chiropractic treatment.

At the end of my year off, all my pain had been resolved. My weight, energy, and mood had normalized. I was able to take a motorcycle trip that I had dreamed about for years. I felt at peace. Interestingly, I did not notice any adverse impact from meat consumption on my meditation and spiritual practice, which was something I had been afraid of. I still had reservations about eating meat but tried to purchase high-quality, organic meats.

I was able to complete medical school and eventually went on to residency at Stanford. I then completed a fellowship in integrative medicine and also decided to learn Ayurveda and functional medicine, the two modalities that helped me the most.

I studied healthy cultures around the world to see what traditional wisdom could teach me. I became a firm believer in the power of nutrition, knowing the impact it had on my life. I learned firsthand about the capacity of the body to heal itself and recover from disease, no matter how bleak things look. Perhaps most important, I developed a strong sense of empathy for my patients, because I had felt that desperation, hopelessness, and despair that one experiences at the lowest points of fighting a chronic illness.

Now, more than ten years later, having helped thousands of patients using these principles, I continue to live my dream of helping people to achieve optimal health using integrative medicine. One of my colleagues, a Feldenkrais practitioner, defines health as the ability to live your dreams. My hope is that by sharing some of the knowledge I have learned from my training and life experience, I can help you gain the well-being and vitality necessary to pursue your own dreams.



# PART ONE

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## Fuel Your Body Optimally

# CHAPTER 1

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## HUNTER-GATHERERS AND BLUE ZONES

You may have picked up this book for various reasons. Perhaps you are healthy and looking to maintain your health, or you have certain nonspecific symptoms like fatigue or indigestion, or maybe you have a serious chronic illness and are looking for ways to feel better. In our fast-paced society, optimal health is something that's rather uncommon. This chapter focuses on populations that have actually enjoyed exceptional health and longevity, to see what lessons we can learn from them to incorporate into our own lives.

### Paleo Is a Starting Point

To begin with, let's look at the question, "What is a Paleo diet?" My definition of a Paleo diet is one that you are genetically adapted to eat, based on what your ancestors ate. Now, we are not trying to replicate exactly the diet that your ancestors consumed, because that is not practical. Rather, my goal is to use insights from evolutionary biology and ancestral health principles to inform our modern approach to nutrition. I believe that ultimately Paleo is more of a philosophy and an approach to eating that focuses on the quality of foods rather than getting caught up in the details of different food categories.

Paleo should not be an end point but rather a point of departure to discover your optimal diet. The PaleoVedic Diet enables you to customize a Paleo framework using the principles of Ayurveda to determine the diet that is best for you and your unique physiology. Ayurveda states that each person has a unique body type and a particular dietary pattern that is best for him or her. You will discover your body type and learn specific diet and lifestyle recommendations in [Chapter 6](#).

### Why Go Paleo?

Why follow a Paleo diet? The premise is simple. Our human genetic code was basically shaped by the 2 million years our ancestors lived as hunter-gatherers, before the advent of agriculture approximately ten thousand years ago. This period of time is known as the Paleolithic era and comprises the vast majority of human history. It's estimated that human beings have lived approximately one hundred thousand generations as hunter-gatherers, compared to about six hundred subsequent generations as farmers. Therefore, for the vast majority of human history, our genes were shaped by the lives our ancestors lived as hunters and gatherers. The agricultural era has had limited effects on our genetic makeup, although there are some interesting initial changes, such as with salivary enzyme levels, as we will discuss later.

British epidemiologist Geoffrey Rose, an expert in public health, explained these ideas in a lucid manner. He wrote that in order to prevent chronic disease, public health officials should recommend removing "unnatural factors" and restoring "biological normality"—that is, the conditions to which presumably we are genetically adapted.<sup>2</sup> While Rose was referring to factors such as cigarette smoking and physical inactivity, other "unnatural factors" are the industrial processed foods that have appeared in our modern era. The conditions to which we are genetically still adapted are diet and lifestyle patterns that mimic those of our Paleolithic ancestors.

# What the Caveman Really Ate

To determine what exactly human beings ate during the Paleolithic era, scientists have examined the fossil record and also studied modern hunter-gatherer societies. Although the popular perception is that ancestral eating centers on meat consumption, anthropological analysis reveals that some of the populations consume very little meat. For example, the Kitava people from the island of Papua New Guinea consume tubers (sweet potato, yam, and taro), vegetables, fruit, coconut, and fish. They typically consume 70 to 80 percent of calories from carbohydrates. Contrast this with the Inuit Eskimos from Greenland, who consume 70 to 80 percent of calories from fat, mostly saturated fat. Their diet consists of seal, walrus, whale, caribou, fish, and occasionally seaweed.

In 2000, researchers analyzed 229 hunter-gatherer populations that had survived long enough to be studied by anthropologists to determine what type of diet they followed.<sup>3</sup> It was found that the populations consumed animal products whenever possible, and had higher intake of fat and protein and a relatively lower intake of carbohydrates (averaging 22 to 40 percent of calories) compared to modern diets. They also preferred fatty animal foods, including organ meats, over the lean muscle meats that we typically find at the grocery store. The wild plant foods they consumed differed from modern carbohydrates in that they were much higher in fiber, higher in nutrients, and lower in simple sugars; they would be very slow to raise blood sugar, causing a correspondingly slow insulin response. As you see in [Chapter 2](#), this difference in the type of dietary carbohydrate and the corresponding difference in insulin response is of critical importance.

## Healthy Starches Were Part of the Paleolithic Diet

Scientists have performed sophisticated analyses (using isotope signatures from fossilized bones) and determined that our ancestors also ate roots, tubers, rhizomes, and other underground plant storage organs; it is likely that the consumption of starchy plants goes back at least 250,000 years, well before the advent of agriculture.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the perception that Paleo is a low-carb, all-meat diet fails to appreciate the fundamental role that healthy starches played in the dietary patterns of our ancestors.

Some of my patients have almost developed a phobia about eating carbohydrates of any type because they have heard many negative ideas about carbs from both mainstream and alternative health sources. There is simply no need for this, because there is nothing intrinsically harmful about carbohydrates. Again, the most important thing is the type and quality of the carbohydrate, which I discuss in detail in [Chapter 2](#). In [Chapter 4](#), I talk much more about wild plant foods that were consumed by our ancestors and provide guidance on how to eat more of these highly nutritious superfoods and their modern descendants.

## Lessons from Weston Price

One of the seminal studies on healthy ancestral populations was conducted by Dr. Weston A. Price, a dentist from Cleveland who practiced during the 1920s. He traveled to hundreds of cities around the world to study populations free of chronic illness and degenerative disease, in places ranging from the Swiss Alps to the Andes Mountains in Peru, multiple locations in Africa, the Polynesian islands, the Arctic, and Australia.<sup>5</sup> As a dentist, Dr. Price's interest was in oral health, and he was surprised to find that there was a remarkable absence of tooth decay and cavities in the people that he visited. This was despite the fact that none of them were brushing their teeth or particularly concerned about their dental

hygiene. This led him to believe that dental health was far more closely tied to nutrition than to hygiene.

Dr. Price conducted his research during an era in which modern processed foods were being introduced throughout the world. In population after population, he was able to provide sobering documentation about how the change from a traditional to a modern diet led to dental cavities, negative changes in facial structure, depressed immunity, and other medical problems.<sup>6</sup>

What can we learn about nutrition from these healthy traditional populations? The diets in the “primitive” populations varied tremendously, ranging from 100 percent animal products and seafood among the Inuit Eskimos to fermented whole grains, vegetables, fruits, sweet potatoes, and meat among the native tribes of Africa. However, common features of their diets were whole, unprocessed foods, an abundance of fats—especially animal fats—from dairy products and meat, seafood and animal proteins when available (especially organ meats), and certain raw plant foods. Some of the diets included seeds, grains, and nuts, but these were typically prepared by soaking, sprouting, fermentation, or other traditional preparation methods that made them easily digestible. There was also a notable absence of modern foods like white sugar, white flour, vegetable oils, and other processed foods.

## The Blue Zones—Lessons for Living Longer

Let’s fast-forward eighty years to modern times. Researchers have identified a few areas in today’s world known as “blue zones,” where populations still enjoy exceptional longevity and good health (but don’t follow a hunter-gatherer lifestyle).<sup>7</sup> These include Okinawa, Japan (where people enjoy the longest life expectancy in the world), Loma Linda, California (where the population lives about ten years longer than other Americans), Ikaria, Greece (where nearly one in three people make it to their nineties), and Nicoya, Costa Rica. Remarkably, all of these different populations appear to enjoy excellent health and are less affected by the common chronic illnesses prevalent in modern society. Let us take a quick look at these blue zones to see what we can learn from these unique groups.

Some factors are common to people in all blue zones. These include regular physical activity that is incorporated into daily living, a whole-foods plant-based diet incorporating homegrown fruits and vegetables, strong social connections with friends and family, and a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Other aspects are unique to particular populations. For example, in Okinawa, Japan, a plant-based diet rich in vegetables, sweet potatoes, and tofu coupled with homegrown spices such as mugwort, ginger, and turmeric provides powerful nutritional support; a clear sense of purpose, termed *ikigai*, or “reason for waking up in the morning,” is important to elders in Okinawa.<sup>8</sup> Another unique practice commonly followed in Okinawa is *hara hachi bu*, which means to stop eating when your stomach is about 80 percent full—a beneficial practice to prevent overeating and limit portion size.<sup>9</sup> Of note, Ayurveda also recommends eating until you’re about two thirds full.

In Loma Linda, California, the Seventh-Day Adventist population is one of the few blue zones in the United States, with studies showing that typical life expectancy is seven or eight years longer than in other parts of California; Adventists are often vegetarian or consume meat only rarely, but consume a nutrient-rich plant-based diet incorporating fruits, vegetables, legumes, and nuts of different types. They also incorporate a weekly break during the Sabbath on weekends when they spend time with family and friends and focus on rest and rejuvenation.

In Nicoya, Costa Rica, strong social networks and a focus on family is coupled with a strong sense of purpose known as *plan de vida*; like many other blue zone populations, Nicoyans get most of the

calories during the daytime and eat a light dinner.<sup>11</sup>

In Ikaria, Greece, there are a number of different factors that contribute to a social environment that promotes longevity. These include very strong social connections, a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and legumes, daily wine consumption, low stress levels, plenty of rest (incorporating a daily afternoon nap) and regular physical activity. Daily moderate consumption of alcohol, such as a serving or two of red wine, is an attribute of Ikarian society that is common in other blue zones as well.

It is important to realize that there is no one magic bullet that explains longevity in each of the countries. What matters is the synergistic combination of multiple factors that contribute to create an ecosystem of health and longevity around each person.<sup>12</sup>

## Eat Anything You Want—Except a Western Diet

The reality is that healthy ancestral populations varied widely in the types of diets they ate and the level of carbohydrates in their diet—but they were still healthier overall. Clearly it is possible for humans to be healthy while following a wide range of diet types. Whenever specific populations deviate from their traditional diets, whatever their traditional diets might be, their rates of obesity and illness appear to increase. Human beings can thrive and be free of disease on a wide variety of different diets—except the modern Western diet. I should clarify that by “Western diet” I mean a diet that features substantial amounts of refined grains, vegetable oils, sweetened beverages, white flour, and sweets.

Once people eat a Western diet, they get Western diseases, especially obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. For example, women in Japan have one of the lowest breast cancer rates in the world, but when these women emigrate to the United States, in just two generations their descendants experience the same increased breast cancer rates as other Americans.<sup>13</sup> Similar trends for breast cancer have been observed among the Inuit Eskimos and Native Americans. The same applies for other types of cancer and other common Western diseases. People within the same ethnic population get more modern diseases when they move to more urban or Western locations; this well-established fact demonstrates the deleterious effects of modern dietary staples such as processed sugars, flour, and refined grains.<sup>14</sup>

In Okinawa, increasing adoption of a Western diet, including processed foods and fast foods, has led to a sharp increase in obesity and related diseases, such as diabetes; the life expectancy of men in Okinawa has also dropped significantly, especially among the younger generation, who are not adhering to the strict diet and lifestyle patterns of their long-lived elders.<sup>15</sup>

The take-home lesson here is that eating nutrient-dense whole foods promotes health. Eating nutrient-poor, calorie-rich foods, especially those with easily digested simple carbohydrates, promotes high insulin levels, which lead to obesity, inflammation, and associated chronic diseases. Maximizing nutrient density in your diet essentially means eating whole foods and avoiding processed or industrialized foods, especially sugar and white flour.

In addition to eating what your ancestors might have eaten, it is equally important and perhaps more so to *not eat foods that were not part of their traditional diets*. The goal is to minimize calorie-rich, nutrient-poor foods such as highly processed grains, refined flour, sweetened beverages, vegetable oils, refined sugar, and candy—foods that your ancestors did not have access to as recently as two hundred years ago.

## The Power of Social Connection

One thing that strikes me the most about the people who live in blue zones is their commitment ~~cultivating social connections and the tremendous value they place on family and friends.~~ When you read about the daily lives of these people, it's interesting to note that many of them spend literally a few hours almost every single day in relaxed, quality time with family, neighbors, and friends. That level of intense interconnectedness is in stark contrast to the epidemic of isolation and disconnectedness that many people in the West suffer from. Although it is difficult to calculate exactly what percentage social connections contribute to the longevity of these populations, there is no doubt in my mind that it plays a huge role.

One simple thing that you can do to start emulating these long-lived communities is to cultivate more richness and more depth in your social relationships. There are many different ways to do this, even if you are single or live alone:

- join a group
- take some classes
- get to know your neighbors
- reconnect with old friends
- deepen your relationships with your loved ones
- make an effort to get to know coworkers
- volunteer in any setting that you enjoy
- get a pet
- connect with others online
- set an intention to strengthen your social connections

# CHAPTER 2

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## CARBS, GRAINS, AND GLUTEN

Carbohydrates are probably the most debated aspect of any modern diet. How much do you need? What types of carbs are best, and in what proportion at each meal? This chapter is a primer on the essentials of carbohydrate consumption. Carbohydrates have an important role in providing energy, antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and fiber; they can help raise levels of the beneficial neurotransmitter serotonin, but can also raise levels of insulin if consumed in excess. I clarify which carbohydrates are best, how much you need, and how to consume carbohydrates while avoiding harmful effects on insulin and other hormones.

The Paleovegic Diet is not opposed to the consumption of carbohydrates. On the contrary, healthy starches are an essential dietary staple for almost everyone. Healthy starches for all people include vegetables, fruits, and tubers. Healthy starches for some people, depending on their tolerance, include legumes, nuts, seeds, and possibly certain grains. There may be certain situations during which diets lower in carbohydrates may be preferable, but I don't recommend a low carbohydrate diet for all people. I also find from my patients' experience, especially within the Paleo community, that people are often consuming far fewer carbohydrates than they realize. This can be harmful for health in a number of ways, for example, by being too low in the beneficial carbohydrates necessary to support healthy gut flora.

### Simple vs. Complex Carbs

As we saw in [Chapter 1](#), the difference between ancestral diets and modern diets is the type and quality of the carbohydrates consumed. Ancestral diets usually had nutrient-dense, low-glycemic carbohydrates. These include vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, tubers, and other plant parts. Notably, they did not include sugar or white flour. In contrast, modern diets feature nutrient-poor, high-glycemic carbohydrates such as most breads, pasta, pizza, sweetened beverages, beer, and candy. The fundamental difference between these two types of carbohydrate is their effect on insulin.

This ties in to my definition of the difference between simple and complex carbohydrates. Simple carbohydrates include most sugars that are broken down and absorbed quickly, such as white sugar, jams, jellies, corn syrup, candy, and sweetened beverages. Honey, unrefined maple syrup, and molasses are examples of simple carbohydrates that are relatively less processed and contain beneficial vitamins and minerals and therefore can be enjoyed in moderation. Complex carbohydrates include starches and longer-chain molecules that are broken down more slowly, such as vegetables of all kinds, beans, and legumes, and properly cooked and prepared whole grains.

Among simple carbohydrates, fructose (like in high-fructose corn syrup) is especially problematic because it is processed by the liver. Known by biochemists as “the most lipogenic carbohydrate,” fructose is the carbohydrate that is most effective at lipogenesis, the creation of body fat—in other words, it is the type of carbohydrate that your body most readily converts into fat.<sup>1</sup> Now, many types of fruit contain fructose, but it is combined with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber and therefore well-balanced as a whole food. Therefore, fructose in fruits is not harmful in moderation, unlike fructose in processed foods and sweetened beverages.

# Quantify Carbs with Glycemic Index and Glycemic Load

The distinction between simple and complex carbohydrates is not as helpful as the concept of the glycemic index (GI), which enables quantification of the effect of foods on blood sugar. The glycemic index refers to how quickly your blood sugar rises when you consume a particular food. It is a scale that goes from 0 to 100, with 100 being white sugar. It is only relevant to carbohydrates, as foods that are mostly protein or fat, such as meat and fish, do not have a major effect on blood sugar. Simple carbohydrates have a higher glycemic index, and complex carbohydrates have a lower glycemic index. Foods with a higher GI tend to raise blood sugar more rapidly, followed by a swift decline or “crash,” while foods with a lower GI produce a gradual, relatively low rise in blood sugar that remains stable.

An additional fundamental concept is the glycemic load (GL). GL is derived from glycemic index but also factors in the amount of carbohydrates in each food and what the typical serving size is, thereby offering a more “real-life” measure of the effect of a particular food on blood sugar. For example, we typically consume a larger quantity of potatoes in an average serving when compared to fruit, and this is factored into the glycemic load calculations. You want to minimize foods that have a glycemic index over 50 or a glycemic load over 20.

**Table 1: Glycemic Index vs. Glycemic Load**

Glycemic Category	Glycemic Index	Glycemic Load
Low	<30	<10
Medium	31 to 50	11 to 20
High	>50	>20

Let’s look at some actual values from the scientific literature.<sup>2,3</sup> Vegetables such as carrots (GL 2), pumpkins (GL 3), beets (GL 4), and green peas (GL 4) have a low glycemic load. Leafy green vegetables have a negligible effect on blood sugar and an extremely low glycemic load. Fruits, although usually medium or high in terms of glycemic index, tend to have a low glycemic load—for example, strawberries (GL 1), oranges (GL 5), and watermelon (GL 4). Legumes also tend to score low on the scale—black beans, lentils, and mung beans all have a GL of 5. Nuts are low glycemic, for example, cashews (GL 1) and peanuts (GL 1).

Dairy products such as yogurt also have a low GL, with plain yogurt scoring lower than those with flavors or added fruits. Processed grains like bagels (GL 24), cereals such as cornflakes (GL 23), and foods made from refined flour tend to rank higher on the scale. In contrast, oatmeal (GL 10) and granola (GL 7) have relatively lower glycemic loads and would therefore be better options, although note that instant oatmeal has a much higher GL of 30. Dried fruits such as dates (GL 18) and raisins (GL 2) tend to rank higher than their fresh counterparts.

In terms of root vegetables, potatoes vary depending on how they are prepared. Boiled (GL 16) and mashed (GL 17) tend to have a lower glycemic load than baked potatoes (GL 33). An excellent way to improve the glycemic index of potatoes is to chill them in the refrigerator for twenty-four hours after cooking them by any method. This transforms the starch in the potatoes to “resistant starch,” which has a lower glycemic index and also is beneficial for your gut bacteria, as discussed in [Chapter 5](#).<sup>4</sup> After you have chilled the potatoes for twenty-four hours, you can either have them cold as in a potato salad, or you can reheat them, and the resistant starch will remain intact, maintaining the lower glycemic properties—these potatoes have a GL of about 8. The addition of a vinaigrette dressing (containing olive oil and vinegar) further reduces the glycemic load of chilled potatoes. The effect of vinegar in this case



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