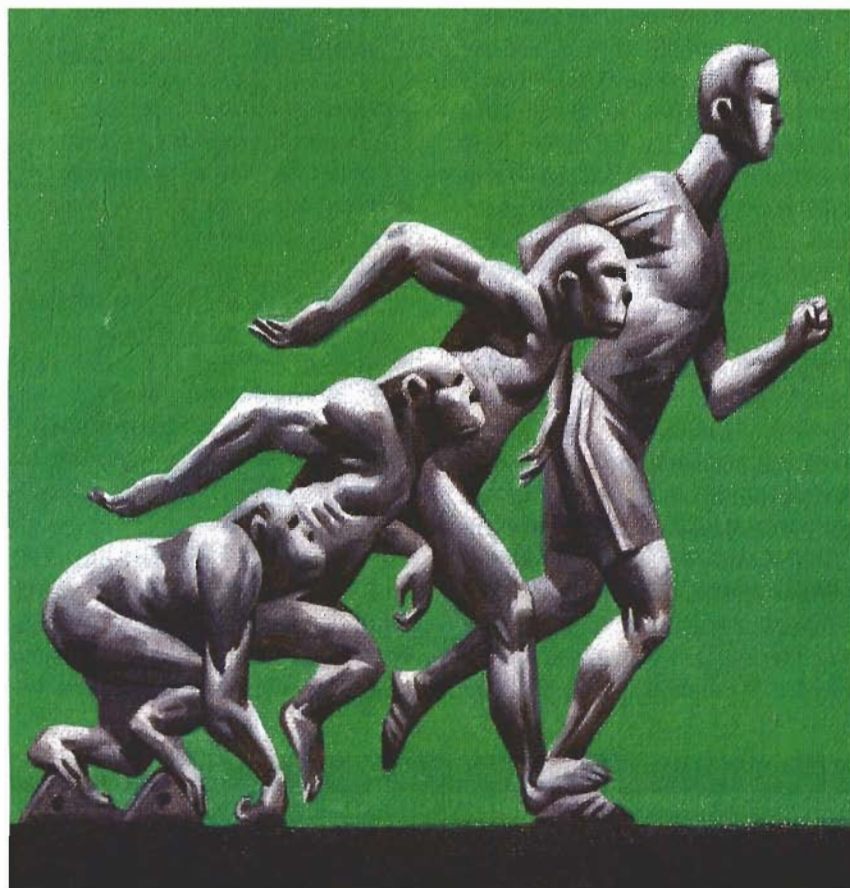


BY AMBY BURFOOT



SHOULD YOU BE EATING LIKE THE CAVEMEN?

A new diet book says you should eat only those foods that existed 2.5 million years ago. Is this nuts?

I'VE BEEN MOSTLY VEGETARIAN for much of my life, so I figured my dinner with the meat-favoring Paleolithic diet experts Boyd Eaton, M.D., and Loren Cordain, Ph.D., would be a little different. It was, but not in the way I expected.

The waitress approached me first, and I thought I did well, ordering grilled salmon with béarnaise sauce, a salad with blue cheese dressing, wild rice, and a glass of red wine. Cordain also ordered the salmon and red wine, but asked for oil and vinegar (on the side) with his salad, and had a question: "Can I get steamed vegetables instead of rice?"

"Sure," said the waitress, who then turned to Dr. Eaton.

"I'd like red wine and a salad with raspberry vinaigrette on the side," he said. "And I'll have the salmon, but please tell the chef to skip the béarnaise sauce."

On hearing this, Cordain asked the waitress to hold the sauce on his salmon, too.

At this point, the waitress looked back at me with a quizzical eye. "Okay, take the sauce off my salmon, and the blue cheese off my salad," I sighed. "And I'll try the steamed veggies instead of the rice."

The meal was not the most lip-smackingly scrumptious of my life. Though I seem to be ordering more steamed vegetables ever since.

Dr. Eaton, a radiologist, and Cordain, an exercise physiologist, are the father and prodigal son of what's being called Paleolithic eating. They believe evolutionary forces dictate that we will live healthiest when we consume a diet similar to what early man ate 2.5 million years ago during the hunter-gatherer days of the Paleolithic Era. This diet included more (low-fat) proteins and (healthy) fats than most of us eat today, and fewer carbohydrates, mainly because Paleo man ate no wheat, rice, or corn whatsoever. These modern grains were not "invented" until 10,000 years ago. In other words, throughout 99.6 percent of our evolutionary history, we ate no bread, pancakes, pasta, or chow mein. As a result, they say, we aren't adapted to process them healthfully.

Cordain has calculated that about 72 percent of the food consumed by you, me, and our friends was utterly unavailable in Paleo times. Here's an even bigger surprise: Paleo runners got 55 percent of their daily calories from meat, and had no trouble covering almost 10 miles a day tracking down their dinner.

In Cordain's latest book, *The Paleo Diet for Athletes: A Nutritional Formula for Peak Athletic Performance*, he argues (along with coauthor Joe Friel) that the Paleo diet can make you fitter as well as healthier. I skim lots of nutrition books and find most of them filled with boring, repetitive fluff—the same lame lessons we all suffered through in seventh grade health class while waiting for the chapter on, uh, reproduction. *Paleo for Athletes* is different; almost every page is packed

with new and amazingly-well-researched material. (Truth in editorial: *The Paleo Diet for Athletes* is published by Rodale Inc., the same company that writes my weekly paycheck.)

A onetime marathoner and current fitness runner, Cordain first learned about Paleo nutrition in 1985 when the *New England Journal of Medicine* published a “Special Article” by Dr. Eaton and his colleague Melvin Konner. In that article, the authors concluded that the Paleo diet contained vastly more vitamin C, fiber, calcium, iron, folate, and essential fatty acids than our current supermarket-based fare. It also contained far less sugar, salt, and saturated fats. They concluded: “The diet of our remote ancestors may be a reference standard for modern human nutrition and a model for defense against certain ‘diseases of civilization.’”

It’s easy to make fun of the Paleo diet. Right away, everyone says, “Sure, and how long did your basic caveman live?” About 20 to 25 years, it turns out. But primitive hunter-gatherers didn’t die from heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure like we do. They died from germs, viruses, and traumas. We live longer today, in large part, because we have sewers, inoculations, and amazing (if expensive) health-care systems.

Many of us are also skeptical about meat in general. We have read about the evils of saturated fats and fast-food diets, and nodded knowingly when we saw Morgan Spurlock’s *Super Size Me*. To this Cordain answers: “It’s true that much of today’s meat is fat masquerading as protein, but there are healthy, lean-meat alternatives. We’re totally opposed to fast-food burgers and the Atkins diet. We’re simply saying, ‘Let’s not

Maybe It’s Time to Cave

According to Loren Cordain, Ph.D, the diet of Paleolithic man was higher in low-fat protein and healthy fats than our current diet, but considerably lower in carbohydrates.

DIET >>	PALEO*	MODERN
Protein	29%	15%
Fat	38%	34%
Carbohydrate	33%	48%
Alcohol	0%	3%

*Averaged from more than 200 studies of current and past hunter-gatherer groups.

throw out the baby with the bathwater.”

Most runners I know would rather sit on the sidelines for six months with a knee injury than go that long without pasta, rice, and breads of all kinds. We

have come to believe that grains are one of the best and healthiest foods, and the United States Department of Agriculture agrees. Dr. Eaton and Cordain don't see it that way. To them, grains are the original fast food—cheap, easy to obtain, overly processed, and not that good for you. We humans first began cultivating grains just 10,000 years ago—a blink of evolutionary time, too short for our digestive systems to adapt. Furthermore, as Cordain likes to say: “Grains can't hold a micronutrient candle to fruits and vegetables.”

Still, Joe Friel was skeptical when he and Cordain first began debating the Paleo diet in the 1990s. A marathoner, cyclist, triathlete, endurance coach, and author, Friel had built his reputation on giving clients scientific support for his training programs. He had a deep belief in pasta power, and tried the Paleo diet himself only to shut up Cordain, his

neighbor in Fort Collins, Colorado. The first two weeks on the diet, Friel felt like crap—“the way I would in the old days when we carbo-depleted before a marathon,” he told me one morning while finishing a long bike ride. But the third week he felt strong enough to increase his training by 50 percent. The fourth week, he increased it another 50 percent, and he's been a true believer in Paleo eating ever since.

In *Paleo for Athletes*, it's Friel's job to explain when to eat carbs, which both authors acknowledge are crucial to top endurance performance, and which carbs to eat. He does this in great detail, explaining how to get the best carbs before, during, and after races and workouts. He's particularly precise about the postrun period, breaking it into three separate “stages” to make sure you transition from fruits and fruit juices to pota-

toes and sweet potatoes, and finally to a mix of carbs with more proteins.

If you try the Paleo diet, says Cordain, you'll likely increase your protein and fat consumption, while modestly lowering your carb intake. But since the carbs you do eat will come largely from fruits and veggies, you'll be swimming in healthful micronutrients. The protein will come from lean meats with low levels of saturated fats, and from fish with high levels of healthful omega-3 fats. You'll get more healthy, monounsaturated fats from canola oil, walnut oil, and olive oil. These fats won't raise your heart-attack risk; in fact, they'll probably lower it.

And there's no reason to worry that your friends will call you crazy like a caveman. “The Paleo diet isn't an oddity,” Cordain says. “What's odd is the way we've been eating the last 10,000 years, and particularly the last 200.” **RW**