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The Paleo Plan

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Refined sugar
and processed oils
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The Paleo Plan

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

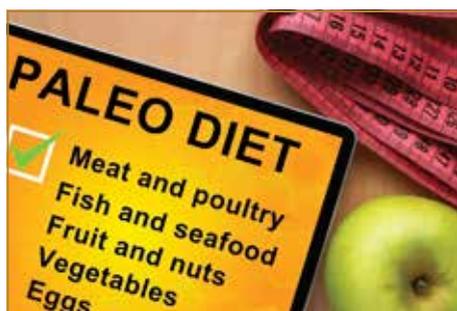
It's highly endorsed
by celebrities.

“We guarantee you’ll lose weight and live longer.” Claims like this abound in the media, extolling the virtues of various diets. The latest is the Paleo Plan, presently one of the most popular weight-loss diets. It was the most searched for diet plan on Google in 2013. Paleo cookbooks have become bestsellers.

The Paleo Plan emphasizes eating like our ancient ancestors. It is hypothesized that people lived a healthier lifestyle before all of the modern food processing and high-calorie fast food existed, along with high rates of obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Proponents for the diet conjecture that humans have not metabolically adapted to the rapidly-changing Western diet resulting from modern food processing, animal-rearing practices and crop manipulation of the past 100 years or so. Critics of the Paleo Plan argue that it is an excessive food energy intake along with a sedentary lifestyle that is more likely to be the underlying factors for the high level of chronic diseases associated with Western lifestyle.

Loren Cordain popularized the Paleo Plan, or “Caveman Diet” as it is often called. The diet he described emphasizes the foods that could only be obtained by hunting and gathering, such as wild game, fruits, nuts, non-starchy vegetables and fish. Missing from the menu would be legumes, grains and dairy, foods that generally are associated with modern farming. Dietary choices that eliminate two or more food groups raise dietary concerns such as nutrient deficiencies. A limited intake of nutrients such as calcium, certain minerals, many trace elements, a lot of B vitamins and fiber would be expected on the Paleo Plan. Archeological research suggests that early human diets probably included wild grains.

While there are no long-term clinical studies detailing the benefits or potential risks of the Paleo Plan, research



has shown that unrefined grains and legumes play an important role in the protection against heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer. In a national survey, people who ate legumes at least four times a week had a 22 percent lower risk of heart disease compared with non-consumers. In the Shanghai Women’s Health Study,

a regular consumption of legumes was associated with a 38 percent reduced risk of diabetes.

Of concern, the Paleo Plan typically emphasizes a higher protein, fat and meat intake than normally recommended by health authorities. On the positive side, foods that are highly restricted or avoided in the Paleo Plan include processed oils, refined sugar, alcohol and salt. Starchy vegetables also are restricted in the Paleo Plan.

The British Dietetic Association recently called the Paleo diet an unbalanced diet and a sure-fire way to develop nutrient deficiencies and compromise your health. They reported that the Paleo Plan ranked second among the top five worst celebrity diets to avoid in 2015. The *New York Post* ranked the Paleo Plan last on its list of the worst diets of 2014. So then, why are people attracted to follow this diet? Are they looking for some magical solution to lose weight and get lured by celebrity endorsement to follow a diet with unproven claims?

Winston J. Craig, Ph.D., RD, lives in Walla Walla, Washington. He is a professor emeritus of nutrition at Andrews University.