Introduction to the Paleo Diet for Beginners

What is the Paleo Diet?

As it has already been mentioned, the paleo diet is based on the dietary habits of our Paleolithic-era ancestors. The modern paleo diet was originally developed by Walter Voegtlin, a gastroenterologist, during the 1970s. After studying the dietary habits of Paleolithic-era humans, Voegtlin became curious to see whether returning to a more primitive form of eating might benefit his patients suffering from gastrointestinal disorders like colitis, Crohn's disease, and irritable bowel syndrome. Thus, Voegtlin prescribed a paleo-style diet for his patients and he was both pleased and amazed by the results.

Not only did Voegtlin's patients respond positively to the treatment, but many of them experienced a complete reversal of their condition. Removing grains and dairy from their diet worked wonders on their bodies, improving digestion and restoring their health. By the 1980s, word of Voegtlin's success had spread and a number of other research groups began to test the benefits of the so-called "paleo diet". In 1985, Melvin Konner and S. Boyd Eaton published an extensive paper attesting to the benefits of the paleo diet for improved health. Other studies of non-Western cultures that followed diets very similar to the paleo diet also revealed a dearth of chronic disease which further supported the paleo diet.

Today, the paleo diet is ever increasing in popularity among athletes, celebrities, and "normal" people who want to improve their health. Though the paleo diet is not identical to the diet our Paleolithic-era ancestors would have followed, it is pretty close. Followers of the paleo diet avoid foods that are the product of modern agriculture – that is, dairy products, enriched grains, refined sugar, artificial sweeteners, processed snacks, fast food, prepared entrees, and other foods that are altered from their natural form. The key elements of the modern paleo diet include eggs, meat, seafood, fruits, vegetables, healthy fats, nuts and seeds.

Benefits of the Paleo Diet

There are many benefits associated with the paleo diet and each person who switches to this diet is likely to experience a unique set of those benefits. The only way to tell what benefits the paleo diet may have in store for you is to try it yourself. Below you will find a list of some of the benefits you may experience in following the paleo diet:

- Increased energy levels

- Improved nutrition and nutrient absorption
- Healthy weight loss or weight maintenance
- Improved digestion and digestive health
- Reduced gas and bloating after meals
- Lower blood sugar and blood pressure levels
- Reduced risk for chronic disease
- Improved energy levels and cognitive function
- Clearer skin and healthier hair
- Improved sleep habits, better quality of sleep
- Relief from depression and anxiety
- Improvement in symptoms of arthritis and other conditions
- Relief from symptoms of respiratory conditions such as asthma
- Reduced blood cholesterol levels

Balancing Your Nutrition with the Paleo Diet

Balancing your diet while following a paleo lifestyle is no different than it is with any other diet – you need to be mindful of what you eat so you provide your body with the nutrients it needs. A good principle to follow in adhering to the paleo diet is to make vegetables the focus of each meal. Meat, poultry, or fish can be an accompaniment to your vegetables along with some fruit or nuts as a supplement. You do not necessarily need to be concerned about tracking your macronutrient intake (the amount of carbohydrates, fats, and protein you eat at each meal) as long as you strive to eat a variety of different foods. Each meal should provide some amount of protein, fiber and healthy fat (think avocado, olive oil, nuts or seeds). You should also be mindful of how much sweetener you are using. Just because desserts sweetened with honey are considered paleo doesn't mean that you have a free pass to eat as much as you want. The key to balancing your diet is to eat everything in moderation.