

PROBLEMS WITH GOING PALEO

The Paleo diet is proving popular with bloggers, media personalities and chefs. But is it good for your long-term health?

what is the Paleo diet?

The Paleo diet is based on the idea that the modern diet is not ideal for our ancient genes, which, according to evolutionists, have not evolved since Paleolithic times. It aims to mimic the hunter-gatherer diet of our “ancestors” with the belief that this will better protect us from chronic disease.

Also known as the caveman or Stone Age diet, it recommends avoiding grains, legumes, dairy and all processed foods such as refined sugar and vegetable oil, while encouraging the consumption of most vegetables (except potato), nuts or seeds, all meats, fish and seafood, eggs and fruit. Nutritionally speaking, the modern interpretation approximates a low-carb, high-protein eating pattern, and it doesn't include the truly ancient foods because these are simply no longer around.

pros and cons

Any diet advocating more whole foods and fewer processed foods is a step in the right direction. However, research on our bodies suggests that eating unlimited amounts of red and processed meat is a strong risk factor for colon cancer and heart disease.

Studies on modern Paleo diets are few and short term, without the ability to confirm long-term effects. Drop-out rates are high and people say the Paleo diet is hard to stick to and costs more.

Further, eliminating wholegrains and legumes could be detrimental to both your gut health and your immunity in the long term. Studies have shown that indigestible carbohydrates and fibre from these foods are critical for promoting the growth and maintenance of healthy bacteria in the intestines. These foods have also been repeatedly linked to a reduced risk of killer conditions in modern humans. Skipping them could mean that you are missing out on food as medicine.

the bottom line

Don't just look at short-term results like weight loss. Due to the potential concerns of eating unlimited amounts of meat and restricting legumes and wholegrains (which actively fight disease), you're better off adopting something old that has been tried and tested. For example, the traditional Mediterranean or Asian diets would be far more beneficial to your long-term health, even with your modern lifestyle.



Sue Radd is the award-winning author of *The Breakfast Book* and co-author of *Eat To Live*, internationally acclaimed for showing how savvy eating can combat cancer and heart disease and improve wellbeing. See www.sueradd.com for more nutrition information or follow her on Twitter @CulinaryMed.