



THE WELLNESS WORD

Laura Malnati, PT, DPT, OCS, CSCS, CWC

DIETS: PALEO? VEGETARIAN? VEGAN? KETOGENIC? Demystifying some of today's most popular diets

Our society is relatively obsessed with food. From advertising campaigns to talk show topics to social media posts and even our own day to day conversations, food is often the focus of our attention. Opinions, tips, new fads, and marketing ploys bombard us each day and can overwhelm us to the point of giving up on trying to eat healthfully. While talking about food and nutrition are important, information overload can be costly. One article says don't eat too much fruit while another says eat nothing but fruit. Your best friend swears carbs are bad while Dr. Oz says to eat whole grains for heart health. Some experts say give up all animal products while others recommend eating meat 3 meals a day. Meanwhile, we're left second guessing all of our food choices, getting frustrated, and feeling guilty about eating almost anything.

Let's go back to the basics and simplify our food rules. I think Michael Pollan said it best in his book *In Defense of Food*: "Eat real food. Not too much. Mostly plants." So, eat food that comes from Mother Nature, not a big

factory; eat only as much as you need to feel comfortably full; and consume the majority of your calories from various kinds of plants. These are food rules upon which even the experts (except those who are paid by the processed food companies!) can agree. Try not to let

**"EAT REAL FOOD. NOT TOO MUCH.
MOSTLY PLANTS."**

~Michael Pollan

marketing gimmicks and contradictory media stories confuse you. Most of these are indirectly trying to sell you something anyway.

However, we still have some confusing decisions to make: should I eat meat? dairy? carbs? How about grains or corn? Answering these questions is where different diet philosophies come into play, and each of them will tell you something a little bit different. Let's take some time to explore each of them, look at their specific pros and cons, and discuss a few things they all have in

EAT TO LIVE, NOT LIVE TO EAT

Food can be a very powerful tool not only for combatting disease, but also for feeling energized, pain free, and happy in our lives. Most of the chronic diseases that plague our world today are completely preventable and maybe even reversible if we ate (and lived) to nourish our bodies instead of only our taste buds. Our bodies are made of millions and millions of cells that depend on very specific nutrients to survive. When the diet contains too many unnatural or overly processed foods, our cells not only miss out on the nutrients they need, but they are damaged by the toxins we eat. If our cells aren't healthy, we cannot be optimally healthy. Sometimes this means we are diagnosed with a medical disorder, but other times it means we just don't feel as good as we could. Either way, eating to improve our cell (and therefore body) function is an important part of maximizing wellness.

common. My hope is that by understanding the basics about each dietary philosophy, you can better interpret the food information you receive and, therefore, make more educated and confident choices for yourself.

PALEO

The Paleo Diet is based on eating modern foods that mimic the food groups of our pre-agricultural, hunter-gatherer ancestors. This diet assumes the human digestive systems is specifically designed to process the foods consumed in the Paleolithic era (thus the name “Paleo Diet”), namely animals and plants. Paleo diet followers believe eating these foods and only these foods will allow our bodies to function optimally. This diet *excludes* foods that have only become available since the introduction of modern agriculture and food science: grains (wheat, oats, rice, etc), legumes (beans, peanuts, etc), dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese, etc), corn, all processed foods, coffee, and alcohol.

Paleo Pros: Paleo diets can be very healthy because of the emphasis on removing unnatural foods from the diet; therefore the calories are coming from nutrient dense plants and animals. Also, recent research suggests eating high quality animal products including muscle meat, organ meat, and bone broth can provide healthy fats and nutrients that other foods cannot.

Paleo Cons: Initially, the Paleo diet was minimalist in nature, advocating for the removal of harmful foods from the diet (like those listed above). However, like anything that has been popular for a while, many adaptations of the diet have been made. One of the changes has been the shift of emphasis to eating high volumes of meat, often at the exclusion of fresh produce. The heavy consumption of animal meat has been shown to increase the risk of health problems including heart disease. One reason for this may be that meats of today are quite different from those our ancestors likely ate. Factory raised animals that are in poor health and fed unnatural diets produce meat lacking the nutrients of wild-caught animals. Some research also suggests that raising, butchering,

transporting, and eliminating the waste produced by our meat obsession is a large contributor to climate change and may be accelerating the depletion of fossil fuels, water, and quality soil.

VEGETARIAN and VEGAN

In the purest sense of the term, a *vegetarian* is someone who does not eat any animal meat but does consume other animal products such as dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt, etc). However, people may define “meat” in different ways and some vegetarians adapt the diet to include fish and other seafood and even poultry. Similarly, *vegans* eat no meat, but they also consume no other animal products such as milk or cheese. In fact, the most devout followers of the vegan lifestyle do not use any animal products including leather or wool.

Vegetarian/Vegan Pros: These diets have many potential benefits. Limiting meat consumption has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease, cancers, and other illnesses. Also, food allergies are often an unrecognized cause of disease and vague health symptoms. Besides gluten, eggs and dairy are two of the most common food allergens. Vegan diets naturally avoid these foods and their allergy risk. Furthermore, limiting dairy intake is known to be associated with a reduced risk of cancer.

Vegetarian/Vegan Cons: Processed, artificial, and sugar-laden foods, all of which are known to contribute to disease, are too often still a part of these diets. If animal products are just replaced by processed grains, sugars, and fats, vegetarians and vegans risk nutrient deficiencies, many diseases, and increased abdominal fat. However, these risks can be avoided if the diet is mindfully structured with nutrient dense high quality plant products. Important considerations for a healthy animal-free diet include: significantly limit consumption of sugar and white flour, eat healthy, whole-food sources of fats and protein, eat varied and deeply colored plants, and soak beans and grains before eating them. Also, for a number of reasons including over-farmed nutrient depleted soil, a plant based diet often still leaves the eater



deficient in vitamin B12 and taking a high quality supplement is often recommended.

KETOGENIC

You may never have heard this word, but you likely have heard about this type of diet. “Ketosis” is when the body burns fat for fuel instead of using a carbohydrate fuel source. Therefore, a *ketogenic diet* is one that contains very little carbohydrate, high amounts of healthy fats (60-90% of the daily Calories come from fat), and small amounts of protein. Ketogenic diets completely eliminate sugar, all grains, white potatoes, most fruits, and starchy vegetables.*

Ketogenic Pros: Because their bodies are accustomed to burning fat stores for energy, those on ketogenic diets can often more comfortably go longer periods between meals without significant repercussions. Studies have shown benefits of ketogenic diets on: brain function, insulin control, abdominal fat percentage, and inflammatory disease recovery.

Ketogenic Cons: This diet shifts the body away from reproduction and more toward a state of repair. Therefore, it can be very beneficial for those recovering from inflammatory and degenerative diseases, but harmful to those trying to conceive. Be sure to speak with a healthcare professional before starting this diet, especially if you are trying to become pregnant. This is potentially a very restrictive type of diet and can put the

eater at risk for nutrient deficiencies. However, if done mindfully many of the risks can be minimized. Those on a ketogenic diet should be sure to eat green leafy vegetables as well as sulfur rich vegetables (ex: onions, mushrooms), eat organ meats as well as muscle meat, and maybe also supplement certain vitamins including E, C, and K.

“Despite their vast differences, proponents of paleo, vegetarian, vegan, and ketogenic diets do all agree on a few key points: **limit added sugar and white flour intake.**”

Overwhelmed yet? The goal of this newsletter is not to make you feel guilty or stressed about what to eat. It’s not intended to persuade you to follow one or another

of these diets. As you’ve just read, science has shown pros and cons to each of them. Despite their vast differences, proponents of paleo, vegetarian, vegan, and ketogenic diets do all agree on a few key points: *limit added sugar and white flour intake*—and that’s advice experts agree we should all follow.

Everyone has different nutritional needs, and I cannot determine exactly what diet is best for you.** We are all different. Listen to your body—what does it crave, how does it feel after meals, do you feel healthy and full of energy? Whether you ultimately choose to follow one of these diets or follow your own plan, feed your cells healthy fuel. There may be no one-size-fits-all diet, but what we eat is important. However, that doesn’t mean it has to be complicated. Keep it simple: Eat real food in as close to its natural form as possible; eat only as much as you need; and stay away from sugar and white flour as much as possible. 😊

**Note:* The ketogenic eating style has recently been dubbed the “low carb diet” and taken on various forms. Unfortunately, the low-carb craze has given the false impression that carbs are “bad,” and the uneducated eater is left feeling guilty for eating a piece of fruit, a potato, or some quinoa. Only on a specific ketogenic diet would one need to worry about significantly limiting these foods. Otherwise, as part of a well-balanced diet, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains have been shown to be very healthy and beneficial.

***If you are concerned about your health or nutrition, please consult a physician for consultation and further testing as needed.*

The WELLNESS WORD is s Newsletter of Peak Wellness, LLC designed to expose readers to various wellness concepts, provide tips on ways to enhance their wellness, and answer common wellness questions. If you have a topic you’d like included, please contact us at: info@peakwellnesstn.com

