



FOREWORD BY
MARK SISSON

AUTHOR OF
The Primal Blueprint
AND
The Primal Connection

THE MODERN NO-NONSENSE GUIDE TO PALEO

DEVELOP YOUR SKILLS TO LOSE WEIGHT,
GAIN ENERGY AND TAKE BACK YOUR HEALTH

ALISON GOLDEN

“The title says it all! This is a straightforward approach to the paleo concept that will help you look, feel and perform your best.”

—**Robb Wolf, RobbWolf.com and author of *The Paleo Solution: The Original Human Diet***

“Alison offers a unique and much-needed tool with *The Modern, No-Nonsense Guide to Paleo*. Having a template to help us live a paleo lifestyle in modern times is necessary as we navigate through our chaotic, stress-filled, and fast-paced world. At every corner turned, we are faced with food temptations, peer pressures, and uncertainties and despite our better intentions, it can be difficult to stay on track with the paleo plan. Fortunately, Alison puts it all in perspective and gives us the tools to stay focused on what matters most; our health!”

—**Sarah Fragoso, *Everyday Paleo***

“I can hold your hand in the kitchen, but Alison’s the one who’ll keep you on the paleo straight-and-narrow. Her book offers smart strategies and actionable plans to kick start a new, healthy lifestyle – and stick to it.”

—**Michelle Tam, *Nom Nom Paleo***

“You’ve probably heard about the concept of paleo/primal living over the past few years. But you may not have a clue about what it actually takes to implement these healthy lifestyle principles into your modern-day life. That’s where Alison Golden swoops in like a superhero to save the day by cutting through the complexities of every aspect of your diet to deliver a walloping blow to the conventional nutritional wisdom that’s had us needlessly cutting our fat and consuming more whole grains. Nevermore!”

—**Jimmy Moore, Livin’ La Vida Low-Carb**

“For just one moment, imagine your favorite teacher: the one who was smart, funny, always encouraged you, and made sure you were successful in whatever you did. This is Alison Golden. Her conversational tone puts you at ease – even if you made a mistake (or three) on this paleo journey. *The Modern, No-Non-sense Guide to Paleo* is about more than just “eating paleo”. It is a how-to guide in making this a lifestyle. I have been on this journey for two years and yet picked up some great information from this book. This is a great read for anyone from beginner to long-timer.”

—**Orleatha Smith, Level Health and Nutrition**

“As a parent of nine kids that “hang out” with plenty of non-paleo friends, I absolutely love how this book helps parents make practical decisions regarding their own health and the health of their children. Alison’s action steps teach beginner and veteran paleo advocates ways that will help them truly become who they want to be as they enjoy the gastronomical experience that paleo has to offer. It’s different than any other paleo book I’ve read and will help you live ‘Paleo in a Non-Paleo World’.”

—**Brad Fackrell, Paleo30DayChallenge.com**

“The thing that amazes me most about Alison is she is a true student of paleo and the lifestyle that defines it. She is constantly picking the brains of the best and the brightest to find out what they do, why it works and how that information can be dispensed to those who need it most. This book is a collection of everything she has discovered with one slight twist. It’s real and it’s practical so people know what they are getting into, and what they need to do to have the success they truly deserve.”

—**Dean Dwyer, DeanDwyer.com**

“This book covers all the basics to educate, motivate and guide everyone to better health. Alison’s sincere commitment to supporting the health of others is evident and comes from experience. She understands how difficult it can be to develop and sustain healthy eating habits. What a great resource with all the tools to look and feel better!”

—**Teresa Tapp, T-Tapp Workout**

“Just because we want to follow a paleo diet, doesn’t necessarily make it easy! But Alison Golden has compiled a fantastic list of strategies and suggestions for developing the skills to make paleo sustainable – for you! *The Modern, No-Nonsense Guide to Paleo* will walk you through both transitioning to a paleo diet and sticking with it over the long-haul, with ideas to help you every step of the way – from organizing your kitchen, to getting enough sleep and activity, to handling vacations and non-paleo friends and family members!”

—**Sarah Ballantyne, The Paleo Mom**

THE MODERN NO-NONSENSE GUIDE TO PALEO

DEVELOP YOUR SKILLS TO LOSE WEIGHT,
GAIN ENERGY AND TAKE BACK YOUR HEALTH

ALISON GOLDEN

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For more information about *The Modern, No-Nonsense Guide to Paleo*, please visit <http://paleononpaleo.com>.

For information about quantity discounts or custom publishing inquiries, please contact alison@alisongolden.com.

This book is dedicated to my sons,
Sebastian and Oliver,
for alerting me to that which I needed to know.

“Every time you eat or drink, you are either feeding disease or fighting it.”

—HEATHER MORGAN

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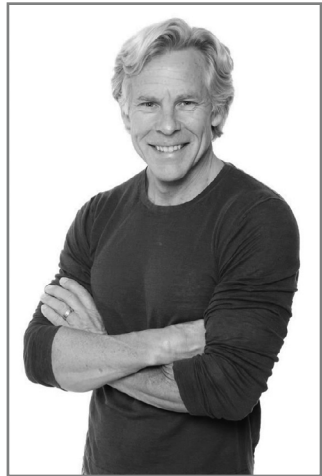
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FOREWORD

Paleo, Primal, ancestral living, eating, and exercising is taking the world by storm. Mainstream media outlets are pumping out articles about it, new blogs are popping up on a daily basis, and your friends and family are talking about this “caveman diet thing.” Whatever you want to call it, ancestral health has officially arrived.



Some people take to paleo like they never knew anything different.

It feels natural, easy, right, normal. For these people, going paleo or Primal or adhering to ancestral eating and living and exercising patterns is like going home. Maybe their families support this way of eating, too, making it a simple transition. Maybe they’ve always kind of eaten this way and giving it a label was just a formality. Maybe they got lucky and never really cared for junk food anyway.

But some people have trouble giving up grains and sugar. Some people don’t have the support system to make paleo go swimmingly. Some people need a little extra help, a nudge (or several dozen nudges) in the right direction before taking off. If you’re one of those people who want to try eating and living this way, who’ve had friends and coworkers rave about the massive

health benefits they've derived from it but don't quite know where or how to start, this book is for you.

It's for you, because Alison Golden has done most of the prep work. There are lots of paleo/Primal books out there – one in particular is pretty decent, in fact – but Alison cuts through all the extraneous language to focus in on what really matters: concrete steps one can take to go paleo and make it work in a modern world full of tempting junk food, skeptical family members, picky children, life and work-related stress, holiday treats, household budgets, and poor sleep habits.

Beside the intro, there's not really a running narrative that you have to follow. It's the quintessential pick up and read from anywhere type book. You can flip around to various sections depending on what you're looking to get out of it. If you're having a problem with planning bag lunches, there's a section for that. If you need help convincing skeptics, there's a section for that.



And it's all laid out with actionable steps.

Luckily, this stuff is easy and it is natural – once you get the hang of it and get past the opening night jitters. After all, it's in our genes and our bones and our blood to eat plants and animals, get lots of good sleep, and exercise smartly on a regular basis. The problem most of us have is that we've

spent so long divorcing ourselves from this Primal way of life that it takes a little work to get back into it.

The Modern, No-Nonsense Guide to Paleo is one of the best tools I've seen yet to get you started and keep you motivated throughout your paleo journey.

Of course, you're ultimately going to have to do the work yourself. You'll have to cook the meals, buy the food, make the lunches, and fight the temptations . . . but now you know where to begin.

—Mark Sisson

INTRODUCTION

Have you heard about paleo, but it seems too hard? Or you've tried it and feel a failure if you compromise or backslide on following the "perfect" paleo lifestyle? Are you intimidated by the magnificent specimens of health and fitness who bang the paleo drum and feel similar achievements are beyond you?

WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

The principles of the paleo diet and lifestyle are anchored in life encountered millions of years ago. But life today is pretty different from back then, and while much of that is a good thing – nay, a great thing – it can make for difficulties when we want to combine the very, very old with the brand-spanking new.

From the advertisements on television featuring succulent cheese pizza to the grandma at your child's baseball game with her ice cream and cookie snacks, to our societal focus on holidays – so many of them – and our insistence on celebrating with enormous quantities of food, our society is obsessed . . . with eating.

Pivoting ourselves on the axis of life so that we eat as we were meant to – for fuel in order to complete the other tasks of life – is a major challenge under these circumstances. It takes time and effort to uncover the behaviors that have been ingrained in us since birth

and perpetuated by those around us. But with continued awareness, practice and sustained effort towards our goals, it can be done, and we can move from erratic, unhelpful and often sabotaging behaviors to a point where our paleo skills are internalized, unconscious and effortless.

With *The Modern, No-Nonsense Guide to Paleo*, you will feel better able to manage this challenge by building the habits, invoking the strategies, and using the tips outlined here. This is the “how of paleo;” how to make better choices, stay consistent, and get healthier, while interacting in a world that not only operates very differently to the way you do, but is also actively pulling you, seducing you, often with care and precision, into its clutches.

WHAT THIS BOOK OFFERS

This isn't a book that covers in detail what paleo is, that's been covered plenty elsewhere. It neither goes into the science to support the lifestyle, nor does this book contain any recipes – there are many others far more talented in those directions than I. Instead, this book is about the skills you'll need to stick with paleo and prevent you from getting sucked into the non-paleo world that surrounds you. In other words, it will help you be successful with paleo in a world that is trying to get you to be anything but. It's full of ideas and processes I've picked up over years of being a life coach, a mom, a productivity and efficiency fanatic and, finally, a paleo advocate.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Each section of this book stands on its own. But like elements of a painting, together they build a portrait. Some strategies work

equally well in multiple sections, others are very specific. You can dive right into the section you are interested in, or you can read from front to back (or back to front, if you're wired like that). The choice is yours.

IS IT PRIMAL OR PALEO?

The term “Primal” comes from the wildly successful book *The Primal Blueprint* and is used to describe author Mark Sisson’s version of suggested lifestyle practices based upon our ancestral heritage. The main difference between Primal and paleo is that Primal advocates the moderate consumption of dairy products. Please know that when I talk about “paleo” throughout this book, I am using the term interchangeably with “Primal.”



PLEASE GO AHEAD AND WRITE NOTES IN THIS BOOK BECAUSE YOUR ACTIVE ROLE IN CHANGING IS ESSENTIAL. ONE WAY TO DO THAT IS TO SPEND TIME CRAFTING YOUR OWN LIFESTYLE CHANGES. AS YOU GO THROUGH, AND AS INSPIRATION STRIKES YOU, JOT DOWN YOUR IDEAS ON THE NOTES PAGES PROVIDED. KEEP THIS BOOK BY YOUR BED, IN YOUR KITCHEN, YOUR DESK DRAWER, YOUR BAG, OR WHEREVER IS MOST HANDY FOR YOU TO ADD TO YOUR TREASURE TROVE OF STRATEGIES AS YOU GO ABOUT YOUR DAY. IMPLEMENT THESE IDEAS AND REVIEW THEM WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH.

SECTION ONE:

UNDERSTANDING PALEO

MY STORY

I first came across the paleo diet back in 2006. It wasn't called "paleo" back then—it was called the "stone age" or "caveman" diet. I found it on some obscure website, the color of which was mostly chocolate brown with an image of Paleolithic man crouched over a fire. It wasn't a particularly attractive look. The website talked about using something called arrowroot and listed a very few number of foods. As our "go-to" food at the time was Mac 'n' cheese out of a box, this alternative seemed seriously extreme, incredibly dull and completely un-doable for a young family. I decided it was only for complete health nuts, and moved on.

I'd been looking for ways to improve my family's health. We were sick a lot, and I was suffering from a whole range of vague, but debilitating health problems. We were spending far too much time at the doctors, and taking too many medications for my liking. I was convinced that our diet lay at the heart of our problems. It had struck me that I had been sick for virtually my whole life. I'd spent much of my early childhood on medications of various kinds. I'd had just about every childhood illness going. I'd had my tonsils removed at age seven due to repeated bouts of tonsillitis. I'd even had scarlet fever. Once my body had dealt with those, my health challenges moved around my body to my skin, my fertility, and a long battle with endometriosis that, although managed with medication, endured for two decades with the only light on the horizon being menopause.

Finally, I devastatingly suffered a second-trimester loss, followed shortly afterward by a diagnosis of Epstein Barr, the virus that causes mononucleosis, from which I just couldn't seem to recover. I'd got to the age of forty-two and could count on one hand the number of years during which I'd enjoyed rude health – and I was so young during those healthy years, I couldn't even remember them! This awareness was eye-opening. Why had I spent most of my years on this earth, sick?

At first, after having dismissed that early version of paleo, I focused on eliminating foods from the diet we typically ate. I removed processed food full of dyes and artificial colors, especially high fructose corn syrup, then salicylates (chemicals found naturally in plants and a major ingredient of aspirin and other pain-relieving medications), gluten and casein. Over the course of four years, I read and tested so many ideas out on my family, they would roll their eyes every time I suggested my latest one. It was only later that I realized I'd been moving in a paleo direction all along without realizing it.

I'd like to say our progress to a clean diet and vibrant health was linear and straightforward, but the fact of the matter was that with little support, our commitment to a healthy diet waxed and waned over those years. We modified our lifestyle, homeschooled one of our boys, and took our own food to parties. But it was difficult to sustain both the kid's enthusiasm and our own for our limited diet. We had seriously different attitudes towards food compared with those of families around us, and I was met with resistance from both within and outside my family. At times, I felt like one of those health nuts I figured must be following that diet I'd rejected earlier!

Meanwhile, we zig-zagged our way through daily life, trying to stay consistent with our diet, but failing many times. I was constantly learning and experimenting. I was gaining skills as a cook, skills that had been non-existent previously, and organizing our meals and our home so that it supported our goals. Each time we fell off the wagon, we'd climb back on again, but I, in particular, was finding it difficult to kick the sugar and wheat products. I had neither a weight problem, nor a health problem that directly correlated with the two foods in my mind, and I resisted enormously the idea they were a serious problem to my health.

I kept resolving over and over to stay away from them. I'd be fine for a few days, but then something would come up, and I'd succumb. Of course, it didn't help that I hoarded both wheat and sugar in their various forms: bars of chocolate, cakes, and packets of cookies were all stashed away in various parts of my house. Doing that made me feel safe. It made me feel I had an outlet for my feelings when things got too much. I could sit down and eat some treat food, and relax. And things did get too much. Daily, in fact. Cakes, cookies and chocolate were my friends, my comfort, and my solace when times got tough. Sometimes, when life was rough with young kids, I felt eating my stash was the only fun I had. I didn't want to give them up. But I was getting increasingly frustrated with my inability to manage my cravings.

Finally, after one vacation back to my home in England, having gorged my way through enough cake and scones to satisfy an army, and frustrated with my seeming inability to resist my treasured childhood foods in even moderate amounts, I resolved that I needed to make some serious changes to my diet. I was still in pain from my endometriosis, I felt exhausted all the time, I couldn't focus, I needed to nap most days, and the anxiety I felt

at never knowing if I'd wake up each morning with the energy to complete the day's activity was consuming.

In July 2010, from the moment the airplane wheels hit the tarmac, I stopped eating wheat. That was the only goal I set myself. I had a few failures, but I started to notice the situations that sabotaged me. I would set up strategies ahead of time to deal with them. I made good progress and started to get more confident in my ability to kick the habit.

I was still eating sugar in all its forms, however, and my resolve might have dissolved the way it had in the past if I hadn't stumbled across a reference to paleo by chance on a completely unrelated website shortly thereafter. Cogs started to whirr in my brain, and I remembered the references to it all those years ago. But now things were different. A quick search uncovered wonderfully informative websites, supporting science, and glorious cookbooks!

I grabbed a copy of *The Primal Blueprint* by Mark Sisson, and after reading it, finally felt vindicated. Here was an author stating in black and white what I had intuitively felt for years. Oh, happy day! The support, information, and conviction enabled me to press on, crafting, refining, and polishing strategies, systems and processes to support our conversion to this lifestyle and remove my addiction to sugar. I had learned over the years that it isn't easy to make this kind of change – if it was, we'd all be doing it.

I am now healthier than I have been since I was a young child. My energy is fabulous, and I can focus just fine. I maintain my weight effortlessly. I haven't been sick in months and months. I can go hours without food. I feel proud of my ability to limit the sugar. I can finally live the life I was meant to live.

There is no going back. Now that I've connected the dots between lifelong illness and my diet, and experienced a tremendous improvement in the quality of my life by merely changing what I eat, it's become a no-brainer. But I wouldn't have been able to do that without developing skills in managing the lifestyle and building environmental supports.

Simply knowing what and why we should do something doesn't necessarily make it happen. So, I've put down here in this book all I've learned over the years about the skills involved in embedding paleo as a way of life. Think of it as a manual on the "how of paleo."

Accept only an optimal life for yourself. It's the only one you have. Dream of how you wish your life to be, then put in place the ideas outlined in this book. I wish you great health, much fulfillment and happiness. Enjoy!



WHAT IS PALEO?

“You can reprogram your genes in the direction of weight loss, health, and longevity by adapting the simple lifestyle practices of our hunter-gatherer ancestors into modern life.”

—MARK SISSON, *THE PRIMAL BLUEPRINT*

This is the fundamental principle behind the paleo lifestyle. Paleo means you live in such a way that your body works in concert with your genetic heritage to optimize your health, strength, weight and stress levels. What you eat; and how much you sleep, work, relax and play all fall under the paleo banner as we understand more and more about how our current lifestyle makes us fat, sick, weak and miserable; and how important it is to make a radical change.

DIET

Much of what interests many about paleo is the diet which focuses on the avoidance of foods that have come to characterize our standard twenty-first century diet – grains, sugar, legumes, dairy and processed foods – and instead favors the consumption of meat, fish, fowl, vegetables, fruit, and nuts and seeds along with a good amount of fat.

Eat:	Avoid:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat • Fish • Fowl • Eggs • Vegetables • Fruit • Nuts • Seeds • Healthy Fats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grains • Sugar • Legumes (incl. beans, peanuts and peas) • Dairy • Processed Foods • Alcohol • Starches

These are the basic guidelines. However, opinions vary, and finessing for special circumstances means that one size does not fit all. For example, you'll find evolutionary diet experts advocating the following in varying situations, and with certain limitations:

- ☞ Dairy consumption
- ☞ Use of starchy tubers and occasionally rice
- ☞ Paleo-ish desserts using natural sugars
- ☞ Consumption of red wine and other alcohol
- ☞ Different nutritional profiles for women

There is a general 80/20 rule that many follow based on Mark Sisson's suggestion to strive for 100 percent compliance and accept an 80 percent success rate, but others may find this rule to be insufficient to meet their weight-loss and other health goals. Individual experimentation is required to determine this, but the above list is the place to start.

EXERCISE

Being paleo is also about limiting the cardio workouts we have come to accept as essential for weight management and, instead, advocates exercise along lines our ancestors' survival needs demanded. Frequent long, slow walks mimic Paleolithic man's travels in search of food every day; lifting heavy weights align with his efforts to build shelters, make tools, and carry wood and dead animals; and occasional short sprints (without the danger) replicate how he would run to hunt down animals or escape predators.

TIME AND HEALTH ARE TWO PRECIOUS ASSETS THAT WE DON'T RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE UNTIL THEY HAVE BEEN DEPLETED.

- DENIS WAITLEY

This kind of exercising is very different from the hours of cardio-dominant exercise programs we typically do today, and also very different from the primarily sedentary lives we lead. We somehow need to close the gap between chronic cardio and being

completely sedentary. Paleo provides the bridge to do this. *Being* paleo, *doing* paleo, and *going* paleo are about **thinking** paleo and making choices that are more congruent with our ancestral heritage than our typical twenty-first-century society norms suggest.

STRESS AND LIFESTYLE

In addition to losing weight, improving our health, and aligning our exercise along ancestral lines, we should also acknowledge that stronger relationships, more relaxation, and greater stress management all have a bearing on our health and, simply, our life fulfillment. The constant challenge is to limit the deleterious effects of life in the twenty-first century while adapting ancient lifestyle principles to modern-day living. If we can do this, we

will not only succeed in life, but also perform at levels that are becoming increasingly rare in our modern-day society.

Living paleo in a non-paleo world is rarely easy, but there is no better time in history to live on this earth if we respect and apply this ancient knowledge. We further benefit if we exploit all the opportunities modern life has to offer. We mustn't simply survive; we must thrive. It is within our possibility to do so. It is what our ancestors set us up for.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE "WHAT" AND "WHY" OF PALEO, PLEASE REFER TO THE FURTHER READING SUGGESTIONS FOUND IN THE RESOURCES SECTION AT THE BACK OF THIS BOOK.

MY PALEO PHILOSOPHY

We all have our own personal set of values that determine our decisions and, from those, our actions and our outcomes. Because of that individual set of values, a decision I make will be different from yours in any given circumstance. What is important to me is likely different from that which is important to you.

I come to paleo with my own brand of thinking, and so do you. Living life to the fullest means compromise, trade-offs, plenty of thought, and decision-making. There are many shades of gray.

I want to enjoy optimal health with lots of energy and a feeling of well-being, but sometimes it is more important to strengthen my relationships or save some time, rest a little, or earn some money. This might require me to deviate from making perfect paleo choices. I may choose to do so if, in the long run, I believe that both myself and those who depend on me are better served.

Do you buy prepared vegetables in the supermarket because you eat more of them if they are all ready for you to cook?

Do you let it all hang out on some holidays and get right back on the wagon the next day or next week?

Do you choose to sit at your computer eight hours a day to earn money in order to take your kids to visit their family over the holidays?

Do you occasionally use your microwave to warm up paleo leftovers because otherwise you might have to dash out the door hungry and then be susceptible to the doughnuts in the coffee room when you get to work?

I do all of the above, now and again. These are the types of decisions we have to make, living paleo as we do in a non-paleo world. They are a reality of modern-day paleo living. I say, don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

THE COMPROMISE PRINCIPLE

We all make compromises. We have to; it is part of life. We may vary in terms of what, how and why we make them, but we make them. All of us.

So, instead of disputing each other's decisions about the finer points of paleo, focus on your life, your health, and your leadership role. If you don't have any fellow paleos in your life, be the role model you wish you had. You may not realize it, but your influence on those around you is profound – you can change lives, save them even. Seriously.

The key to designing your paleo lifestyle is in understanding your own personal values; the elements and beliefs that drive you forward. Being paleo in a non-paleo world is about making *conscious* decisions every minute of the day and doing so with a full awareness of the consequences of your actions. Accept that your actions and consequences are the result of choices you make, and as such, hold yourself personally responsible for the outcome of those choices. Millions have died over eons to give you this right to freedom. Don't squander their sacrifice.

YOUR PALEO PRESCRIPTION

For some of us, following the basic guidelines of the paleo diet isn't enough. Many of us are highly sensitive to certain foods or are damaged by our years of eating processed and additive-laden packaged food, grains, vegetable oils, and other "foods" making up the diet we typically see today. We react poorly, even when compliant with the paleo diet. We need to go further.

As someone who had been sick most of her life, I can vouch for the fact that turning back the tide after all those years isn't always as straightforward as dropping a few pounds or certain foods from our diet.

When improving your health, whether it be by losing weight, getting your blood sugars down, or improving (a) your asthma, (b) your fertility, or (c) some other chronic illness or condition, the first actions to take are:

- ☛ Get enough sleep
- ☛ Lower your stress
- ☛ Follow the diet

Make sure you are sleeping enough, not over-working or doing too much exercise, and being compliant with the diet. If, after a few months, you are still experiencing issues, you need to start experimenting on yourself.

Occasionally, tracking down the cause of your health problem is like being a detective. Some puzzles are solved fairly simply. But for others, it will take time. No one size fits all.

Experiment with the paleo combo that works for you – your personal paleo prescription.

Maybe you need to cut out more food or certain types of foods. Maybe you need to add supplements. Maybe you need to create your own combination of foods, exercise, stress-relieving techniques, and supplements, and design a custom paleo prescription just for you.

There may be layers to your problem, you may go down a few rabbit holes, and you may need to request the assistance of others in your quest or make some lifestyle changes.

Whatever you do, don't just follow the basic paleo guidelines and give up if it doesn't work right away. It might take years for you to really dial in your diet and work it all out. It took you years to get to this point, so there may not be a quick fix to your problems. You need time to test and review the results of your $n=1$ experiments.

So, do that, give it time, and be dogged. Success in life is ultimately about persistence.

PALEO SUCCESS: BUILDING SKILLS IN A NON-PALEO WORLD

I mentioned earlier that committing to paleo had occurred after several years of waxing and waning in terms of complying with a healthy diet. Even after embarking on the diet aspects of the lifestyle, I still had my “off” days. But over time, they have become fewer and fewer until, for the most part, I don’t even have to think about it.

So, how was I able to steadily change our diet over time to encompass paleo principles when previously I’d been erratic and inconsistent?

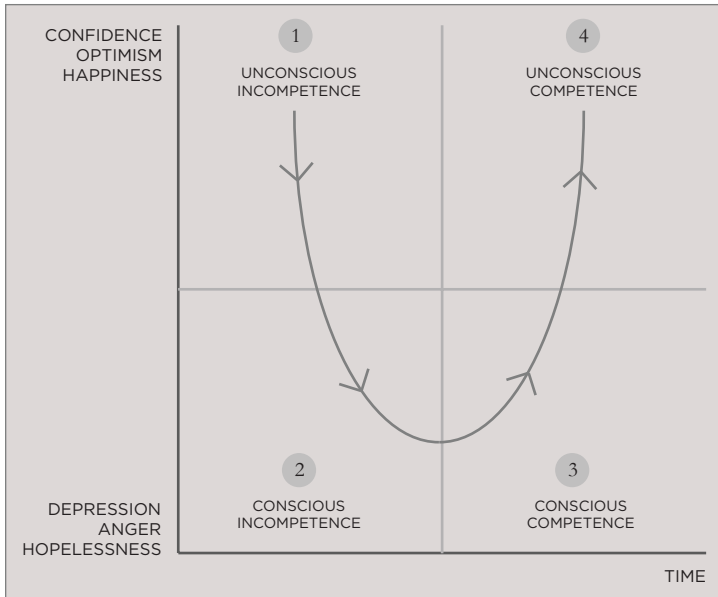
THE FOUR KEYS TO PALEO SUCCESS

- ☞ Staying focused on the goal
- ☞ Building skills
- ☞ Course-correcting as necessary
- ☞ Practice and persistence

Improving your health by changing what you eat isn't just about learning *why* you should eat differently or *what* you should eat instead, it is also about learning the *skills* necessary to get the job done. Without recognizing this fact, it is difficult to implement the change necessary to live a true paleo lifestyle.

THE FOUR STAGES OF LEARNING

When we learn a new skill, we pass through four stages:



Stage 1: Unconscious Incompetence

This is the “We-don’t-know-what-we-don’t-know” stage when we lack a certain skill but are blissfully unaware of the deficit or are uninterested in acquiring it. This lack of awareness or disinterest can lead to a confidence that far exceeds our capabilities. As we become aware of the skill and its value to us, our motivation to move out of this stage increases.

Stage 2: Conscious Incompetence

This is the tough stage; it’s when we don’t possess a certain skill, and we know it. Think of when you first learned to drive a car. You were cranking the gears and over-steering, right? It was acutely embarrassing, most likely. Emotional distress and depression generally accompany this stage, often to the point that we abandon our attempts to learn the desired skill. Intense motivation to attain our goal is necessary to pass through this point.

Stage 3: Conscious Competence

Here, we’re starting to learn the skill. We start to transition the odd gear smoothly, we’re getting our steering on target, but we’re having to concentrate and think about it, often very carefully. Our mood improves, however, often steeply, as we start to acquire the skills. We start to “get it.”

Stage 4: Unconscious Competence

This is when we can perform a skill without thinking about every step. Often we’re thinking about other things while we’re performing them. The skill is integrated and internalized, and conscious thought is no longer necessary. Confidence is at its

peak, and your performance of the skill is habitual.

THE FOUR STAGES OF LEARNING *PALEO*

This learning theory describes succinctly the process we go through when we move from being unaware of the connection between our lifestyle and the quality of our health through to achieving mastery with paleo.

Stage 1: Unconscious Incompetence

This occurs when we're young, uninformed, or in denial about the fact that our diet drives our health. We either don't know this connection exists or that our poor health can be reversed, or we don't have any feedback in the form of health issues. Therefore, we can't see the value in eating differently.

Stage 2: Conscious Incompetence

Here, we embark on practicing the tenets of the lifestyle – we resolve to work out more, eat less and better, we go to bed earlier, and we play more often. And while it may go well for a while, we inevitably (because we live in a non-paleo world) come up against a hurdle – a holiday meal, a hard day at work, or a sleepless night with a sick child – and we find ourselves committing a “paleo faileo” and shoveling chocolate into our mouths, buying a ready-made meal, or skipping a workout. When we do this, we're seeking to relieve our uncomfortable feelings. This, though, may cause a vicious cycle to ensue as we beat ourselves up for our perceived failures and turn yet again to our food in a cycle that is hard to stall. Many people bail from paleo at this point, convinced that it is too hard.

Stage 3: Conscious Competence

This is when we start to see successes. Not just those we storm through using willpower, but also ones where we face a challenge to our paleo ways and head them off using strategies we've devised. We're not eating cookies, because we haven't bought any; we've said, "No, thank you" to our co-workers' break-room doughnuts; or we've bought a kettlebell and placed it in plain sight to overcome the inertia that settles when getting a workout requires a drive to the gym.

Stage 4: Unconscious Competence

Everything is dialed in. You can look at cupcakes and not be tempted. Your workout is built into your daily schedule and is as habitual as cleaning your teeth. Your bedtime is 10 p.m. sharp, and your favorite TV programs are on "record." You've renegotiated your working hours to avoid the daily commute. Or perhaps you've moved to a different state or country to reap the benefits of a warmer climate or greater opportunities to support your goals.

Paleo life will always be a work in progress; paleo perfection is a myth. But, with effort, persistence, and an emphasis on the Four Keys to Paleo Success and an understanding of the Four Stages of Learning, we can transition from incompetence to mastery.

THE MYTH OF WILLPOWER AND THE EFFECTS OF STRESS

When we are attempting to achieve anything worthwhile, we need more self-discipline and less impulsivity. As Steven Pressfield says in *The War of Art*, we don't feel any resistance to giving up

working with Mother Teresa to work in marketing . . .

When someone starts the process of transitioning to a paleo lifestyle, they typically read up on it, find out what foods they can eat, sign up for a gym membership or other workout program, and off they go, determined this time it will be different. When they stumble, have a paleo faileo, or fall off the wagon, they often give up. If they don't give up, they resolve to do better, pick themselves up, and start over. In other words, they rely on willpower to get them through.

Willpower or self-control is highly desirable. It is something we all want more of – success in life rarely visits the impulsive, devil-may-care types. The famous Stanford marshmallow study¹ and subsequent follow-ups showed clearly that those who exercise self-discipline, even in childhood, are considered more competent and perform better years later.

Willpower is used for self-control, resisting urges, planning our reactions, and careful execution. It is called the pause-and-plan response and helps us resist temptation and override impulses. And it is in direct opposition to our fight-or-flight stress response.

In her book, *The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works, Why It Matters, and What You Can Do To Get More of It*, author

1 In the “Stanford Marshmallow Study” of 1972, children were offered one marshmallow. If children resisted eating the marshmallow, they were promised two marshmallows instead of one. Follow-up studies showed that those children who demonstrated self-control under these conditions were more competent and had higher SAT scores more than ten years later. Delaying self-gratification in pursuit of goals was also found to be a life-long characteristic and was related to pre-frontal cortex differences between the two groups.

Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D., writes about how the biology of the body's stress response and that of willpower are mutually exclusive. The adrenaline rush of the fight-or-flight response causes the brain to react instinctively, stealing energy away from parts of the brain that are designed for wise decision-making. Stress will also cause us to focus on short-term goals and decisions while the pause-and-plan response of the brain reflects on the bigger picture. Stress is the antithesis of willpower.

The problem is further compounded when you consider that we have a finite capacity for willpower². Willpower gets used up over the course of a day, even by unrelated tasks. So, the control you showed when you got cut off by that idiot driver this morning during your daily commute may have a direct impact on your ability to resist chocolate candy during your evening. I'm sure you can relate to the effects of a stressful day on your eating habits. Stress and willpower cannot co-exist once a certain level of daily challenge is reached.



WILLPOWER IS A MIND-BODY RESPONSE, NOT A CHARACTER TRAIT, SO
LET THAT ONE GO . . .

2 A 2007 study shows that self-control is an important key to success in life and appears to be a limited resource. Just as a muscle gets tired from exertion, acts of self-control cause short-term reductions in subsequent self-control, even on unrelated tasks. Research has supported the strength model with respect to eating, drinking, spending, sexuality, intelligent thought, making choices, and interpersonal behavior. Motivational or framing factors can temporarily overcome the problem. "The strength model of self-control". Baumeister, Roy F.; Vohs, Kathleen D.; Tice, Dianne M.

However, we are not doomed to fail. We can increase the amount of willpower available to us, even if we've been lacking up until now. We can:

- Build up our willpower muscle
- Lower the amount of stress stimulus in our life
- Create an environment that supports the achievement of our goals
- Take up specific habits that increase our ability to pause-and-plan

STRENGTHENING YOUR WILLPOWER MUSCLE

PERFECTION IS IMPOSSIBLE. HOWEVER STRIVING FOR PERFECTION IS NOT. DO THE BEST YOU CAN UNDER THE CONDITIONS THAT EXIST. THAT IS WHAT COUNTS.

~JOHN WOODEN

Your willpower can get worn down, as I'm sure you've seen in your daily life. We resist, resist, resist, and then bam! All your resolve goes out the window and you eat, maybe gorge, your way through the holidays, your vacation, your weekend, or just a bag of chips. Living with a non-paleo person or people can be particularly trying

under these circumstances. At times, it feels like that packet of cookies must have a personal line to your brain.

But you can weaken the connection between you and your temptation. Each time you say "No," you are strengthening your "willpower muscle." By training this muscle, with practice and over time, new behaviors become habits, cravings and temptations become less overwhelming, and willpower challenges may even

become fun, as shown by those people who take up exercise and end up running marathons! And “No” doesn’t have to be literal. Anytime you choose health over disease, you are saying, “No.”

REDUCING STRESS AND BUILDING SUPPORTS

All of us, at one time or another, have to up our game to deal with an emergency – a real one or a modern-day crisis such as a major deadline or our boss yelling at us. But some people live their entire lives in situations most of us would consider ongoing high-alert. I know they do, because they write to me and ask me for advice.

It is almost impossible to stay paleo under these circumstances. As we’ve seen, when we’re under stress, adrenaline causes us to make urgent, instinctive decisions that meet the immediate need. Stress doesn’t care about our health down the road. Ongoing high levels of stress will sabotage your paleo efforts. It takes time and focus to start and maintain a paleo lifestyle, and if you are being pulled in many directions, that focus will be lost.

If you are experiencing continual high stress over a long period of time, you need to take steps to remove as many of your stressors as possible. Major life issues include high-stress work situations, parenting young children, full-time study, managing a health crisis, moving house, dealing with the death of a loved one, and divorce or a major breakup. These things drain us. Dealing with two of them at once is probably as much as most of us can handle while still maintaining our paleo goals. This is particularly so if you are not completely immersed in paleo life (you live, work, and play among other non-paleo people almost entirely), or you are not

yet at the stage where paleo skills are automatic. Recognize the sources of stress in your life; don't blow them off. Cut back on your stress if you are overloaded and build stress reduction into your daily routine.

But often stress is about having too much to do and too much chaos – things could be changed with some paring down and adjustments. If this is the case for you, and you are being derailed, maybe often, there are many things you can do to help support your transition to a paleo lifestyle.

One of themes of this book is that small changes can lead to big results. We can increase our ability to slow down, instill habits that support our goals, and remove behaviors that sabotage our achievement of them. This book is designed to help you do that. It will give you ideas to insert a pause or put an obstacle in your way to allow the decision-making part of your brain to take control and to give you the opportunity to learn new habits by creating a supportive environment in which to do so.

If we don't put these structural supports in place to underpin our efforts, we will continue to fail to the point where we give up. If you are out of willpower by 10 a.m. and reaching for the chocolate, know that there is too much stress and not enough calm in your life. Remember, willpower is not a personal virtue.

**THANK YOU FOR DOWNLOADING
THE FIRST SECTION OF
THE MODERN, NO-NONSENSE
GUIDE TO PALEO.**

The remainder of the book offers emotional and environmental strategies and advice to support you as you work your way through the learning process.

You can order your print or Kindle copy from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

It has been described as, “a unique and much-needed tool”, “a practical toolkit that can be read over and over”, “a quick, efficient guide for you to get going on the Paleo diet”.

