

Reflection #1: the Paleo diet

We have discussed some views on the diet and environment of human adaptation, as well as the diets of our close primate relatives. These debates receive popular expression in the form of diets like the Paleo or Caveman diet. Proponents argue that the best diet for modern humans is a close approximation of the diet of early humans and human ancestors, and that we should avoid foods that were adopted during and after the agricultural revolution: namely, grains, legumes, dairy products, refined sugar, and processed foods.

Steps in the assignment

1) Follow the Caveman Diet, to the best of your ability given the availability of foods on campus and any dietary restrictions you may have, for at least two days, preferably a few more. Avoid foods early human ancestors would not have eaten, and eat only foods available to hominins, as advocated by the Paleo Diet.

Foods on the Paleo Diet

- Meat, Birds (chicken) and Fish
- Eggs (from free range birds)
- Fruit and Vegetables
- Nuts, eg. Walnuts, Brazil Nuts, Macadamia, Almonds
- Berries - strawberries, blueberries, raspberries etc.
- Root vegetables- sweet potatoes, carrots, turnips, parsnips, rutabagas, beets etc.

Foods NOT on the Paleo Diet

- Grains- including bread, pasta, noodles.
- Beans- including string beans, kidney beans, lentils, peanuts, and peas.
- Potatoes
- Dairy products
- Added sugar and salt - your food should already contain adequate amounts.

2) Reflect on your experiences, especially on how your body felt during and after eating this restricted diet (though keep in mind that it takes longer than a day for your body to adjust to any new dietary regime) and consider the availability of different foods (if you had trouble finding foods, why? If some foods were expensive, why?), the social/economic/environmental impact of these dietary choices, etc.

3) Write a 2-3 page essay. You should include a summary of what you actually ate and your experiences, but the bulk of the essay should evaluate the usefulness of this approach to modern diet, on the basis of your own experience and what you have learned about human evolution, diet, and society. Be sure that your essay includes evaluation and analysis beyond just saying you felt hungry or energized. You could take this in many directions, so narrow your focus to produce an insightful and conclusive essay rather than mentioning everything you can possibly think of.

Note: If you do not feel comfortable experimenting with this diet, please come see me after class to work out an acceptable substitute research project. See me to discuss how to adapt this diet to a vegetarian or vegan diet or other restrictions.