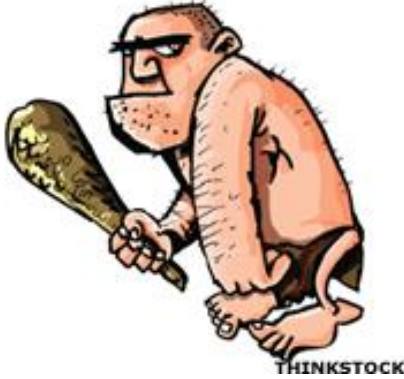


The Paleo Diet: A First-Hand Account

By [Ciara Larkin](#)



NEW YORK ([MainStreet](#))—Let me just start off by saying that I am not, in fact, a modern-day cavewoman. I do not wear pieces of fur on my body, not even the kind you can buy at the store. I do not grunt, nor do I make fire with sticks and rocks.

I do, however eat meat—a lot of it. And vegetables—lots of those. I eat fruit when I want fruit, and I don't worry about counting my carbs with each bite. As a follower of the much buzzed-about Paleo Diet, a.k.a "The Caveman Diet," I can tell you that it has [improved](#) my health, simplified my life and saved me a lot of money in the long run.

Now, don't get me wrong—the Paleo Diet is not about eating whatever I want, whenever I want. The whole mantra behind the diet can be explained in one statement: just eat real food. It sounds simple enough, but I admit that it took a lot of research and one of my best friends to get me to where I am. Prior to starting Paleo, I was around 15 to 20 pounds heavier, which, at a height of 5'2", can feel like having another small human strapped to your thighs. I would manage to lose some weight, but then I'd plateau. My plateaus would lead me into depression, which would then lead me into the open arms of my arch nemesis: sugar.

Sugar was like an unhealthy, addictive boyfriend--something I returned to despite the destructive consequences. I loved jelly beans, chocolate and tons of caramel in my iced coffee. I was also a big binger—if I ate a handful of jelly beans, I'd feel like I had already messed up my whole day, and I'd go on to eat half the bag. I was embarrassed, I was nauseous, and eventually I was just finished living like that.

I started to research sugar addictions, and while researching I came across Paleo. I have a friend who has been following the diet for years, and, at that time, she became my nutritional guru. She opened me up to a ton of wonderful Paleo blogs, and I have listed a few of my favorites at the end of this article. She and I decided to tackle a Whole30 together, which is a 30-day program brainstormed by Paleo bloggers Dallas and Melissa Hartwig of [Whole9](#). They explain that in order to see how dramatically the Paleo Diet can change your life, you need to cut out a long list of common, inflammation-causing foods for a minimum of 30 days and monitor how your body reacts. And, boy, does it react! It withdraws, it makes you lag, and then, it slowly starts to give you more energy, better sleep, and a ton of health improvements.

The foods that must be cut out in order for the Whole30 to work properly, are as follows:

- Refined sugar and even Paleo-approved sweets and treats (baked goods made with almond/coconut flour, foods sweetened with honey, maple syrup and/or agave nectar)
- All grains, including wheat, barley, oats, etc.
- All beans and legumes, including peanuts
- All processed, packaged foods, unless the ingredients listed are ALL real food items (i.e. spices, vegetables, meats, etc. "Natural flavor" is NOT natural.)
- Dairy* (some people on the Paleo Diet choose to incorporate pastured, fresh dairy if they find they are able to tolerate it, but for Whole30 purposes, no dairy at all.)
- Alcohol

I know you're probably all like, "But I LOVE pizza!" because that was me, too. I'm Italian. I love pizza. It was hard to stop eating it, but I did it. I used to never be able to even SMELL pizza without needing to have it. Now, if somebody wanted to hold it under my nose, I wouldn't feel the need to take a bite.

One of my favorite aspects about the Paleo Diet is that it's the first diet plan in which I've been unable to find any scams or catches. I haven't felt the need to waste any money on special foods items distributed by some highly-marketed flagship company. It is also the first diet that I've ever followed that targets not only weight loss, but health benefits as well. It's shocking to me now that, in the past, I really did not care, or even think about things like my blood pressure, kidney function or vitamin levels.

In order to succeed on the Paleo Diet, you need to allot yourself a decent amount of time to prepare your meals. I food shop every week, and I plan my meals accordingly. Because my lunches no longer consist of microwaving a low-fat

macaroni and cheese for 3 minutes and 30 seconds, I need to be sure that I either have enough time in the evenings to prepare a good lunch for the next day, or to prepare a large enough dinner where I have enough to use as leftovers. Like most of you, I do have a day job, and I don't have endless time to spend cooking.

To give you a better idea of what you're working with as far as "Paleo on a [budget](#)," I have included one of my weekly grocery lists** below, and the meals that I made with the food items that I purchased. As you can see, my groceries only cost me around \$60 for the week, which is fairly affordable. By planning my meals*** and consuming all my leftovers, I make sure that what I buy never goes to waste.

So this is where I leave you. I am no expert, I am just a 20-something woman who tries her best to stay on top of her nutrition, while balancing a busy schedule and a tight budget. This lifestyle takes a lot of work to succeed, but the rewards are always more than enough motivation to keep me going.

5 of my favorite Paleo blogs:

- [Whole9](#)
- [Mark's Daily Apple](#)
- [Balanced Bites](#)
- [Nom Nom Paleo](#)
- [PaleOMG](#)

Grocery List and Approximate Prices*:

- Organic, cage-free eggs, 2 dozen: \$8.00
- 2 lbs. lean ground turkey, \$9.00
- 2 lbs. lean ground beef, \$10.00
- 2 pkg. of boneless chicken breasts, \$9.00
- 3 avocados, \$5.00
- 1 head cauliflower, \$1.50
- 1 head broccoli, \$1.50
- 1 head iceberg lettuce, \$1.50
- 2 tomatoes, \$2.50
- 1 yellow onion, \$1.50
- 5 organic sweet potatoes, \$10.00

Meal Ideas:

- Ground turkey stuffed sweet potatoes (recipe courtesy of PaleOMG, <http://paleomg.com/loaded-turkey-stuffed-twice-baked-sweet-potatoes/>)
- Egg muffin cups, which can be made with any combination of meats and veggies (<http://whole9life.com/2010/10/stm-spinach-muffins/>)
- Burgers wrapped in lettuce and topped with tomato slices, either fresh or sautéed onion, and a fried egg, with a baked sweet potato (or homemade sweet potato fries!) on the side (<http://nomnompaleo.com/post/6172268400/oven-baked-sweet-potato-fries>)
- Grilled chicken breast with roasted broccoli and garlic cauliflower "mashed potatoes" (<http://nomnompaleo.com/post/1657598867/best-make-ahead-side-garlic-cauli...>)
- Another burger variation with the leftover ground beef/ground turkey (<http://civilizedcavemancooking.com/entrees/beef/avocado-stuffed-burger/>)

Notes: *Grocery prices based out of Long Island, NY.

**Fresh, organic produce is always optimal. Organic, grass-fed meats are optimal as well. If these are available, I try to purchase them as often as possible. If they're not within budget, I try to purchase the highest quality of all products that I can [afford](#).

***Meal plans. I do not plan my meals by writing out "breakfast, lunch, and dinner" every day of the week. I make what I'm in the mood for at the time, with the foods that I have. I do, however, jot down meals that I want, and make sure that I purchase the foods that are required.

--Written by Ciara Larkin for MainStreet