

Much of the world seems to be in a paleo-craze these days, or in some people's view, living in the world of paleofantasies. Much of the focus has been on the paleodiet, known to some as the Caveman diet.

The first edition of *The Paleo Diet: Lose Weight and Get Healthy by Eating the Foods You Were Designed to Eat*, by Loren Cordain, was published in 2002. According to the revised edition published in 2011, the book became one of America's best-selling diet and health books, with more than 200,000 copies sold. Cordain (2011, xi) describes the diet as

the diet to which our species is genetically adapted. This is the diet of our hunter-gatherer ancestors, the foods consumed by every human being on the planet until a mere 333 human generations ago, or about ten thousand years ago. Our ancestors' diets were uncomplicated by agriculture, animal husbandry, technology, and processed foods. Then, as today, our health is optimized when we eat lean meats, seafood, and fresh fruits and veggies at the expense of grains, dairy, refined sugars, refined oils, and processed foods.

Repeating this basic premise elsewhere, he asserts that indeed, for most of the 2.5 million years (when the genus *Homo* emerges) "every human being on Earth ate this way."

Archaeology and biological anthropology simply do not support this. To archaeologists the notion that

there was such thing as a common diet in prehistory is absurd. The idea that we have not continued to evolve, especially in regard to digestion, is also ridiculous. A good example is the evolutionary change occurring several thousand years ago facilitating the ability of many adults to effectively digest dairy products.

The success of the book, as with other diet and health books, may have more to do with the fact it works – but not for the reasons people think. The premises and assumptions of the paleodiet are faulty. The popularity of the diet may also be related to what some refer to as "paleo-nostalgia," which is taking a view of the "good old days" to the extreme.

Another example of a paleofantasy is associated with the exercise regimes based on assumptions about past lifestyles. Popular paleo-workouts emphasize such things as simulating perceived lifestyles in the past, including lots of running, jumping, spear-throwing, and fighting, which once again are based on faulty perceptions. As with diet, there was never a single lifestyle activity, and notions that most people of the past were involved in spear-throwing on a daily basis are equally absurd. In fact, for many people of the past, running, spear-throwing, and fighting were probably rare occurrences. A more realistic paleo-workout would likely involve lots of walking.

For more debunking of the paleodiet and other popular thoughts and actions based on misunderstandings of the past, *Paleofantasy: What Evolution Really Tells Us about Sex, Diet, and How We Live*, by Marlene Zuk (2013), is recommended.