

Chapter 1

Paleo Fitness: The (Ab)Original Blueprint for Physical Excellence

In This Chapter

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It's been quite some time since the public was afforded the luxury of an exercise program that actually makes sense and isn't full of absurdities or ridiculousness. From diet pills to shake weights, "progress" in terms of health and fitness over the past decade has been little more than the swapping of one gimmick for another.

Paleo fitness is not about presenting something new; it's about getting back to what works. Because we already know what works, and we always have.

Paleo fitness means working out like a cave man. We use the cave man to symbolize the idea of getting back to basics, specifically in these areas:

- ✓ Back to the big, fundamental human movements
- ✓ Back to movement that is beautiful, unrestricted, and pain-free
- ✓ Back to movements proven effective for burning fat, building muscle, and boosting resilience

So we want you to perform all movements that the cave man needed to do on a daily basis to survive. And that means pushing, pulling, hinging, squatting, sprinting, carrying, and jumping.

Shifting Your Paradigm to Paleo: Live Long, Live Strong

Most people think that bodily health is plainly the result of eating less of what they want to eat and doing more of the things they don't want to do. But we aim to challenge that assumption to prove that a beautiful body and beautiful movement can be the result of an enjoyable, active lifestyle and not grunting and tears.

When you first change your paradigm to Paleo fitness, it may feel a little odd, and that's okay. In a world of “more, more, more,” doing less often feels weird. And at times on this Paleo journey, you'll feel like you haven't even worked out at all. Not a bead of sweat will drop from your brow. You'll be done with your workout in less than 15 minutes, and that'll be it for the day.

You may even feel almost as if you're cheating. And perhaps, in a way, you are cheating because, perhaps, you have a slightly unfair advantage. That advantage is knowledge — the ability to understand that working out isn't all about the sweat or the burn. And knowing that *effort* isn't synonymous with *effective*; in other words, *working hard* doesn't always mean *working right*.

Changing your mindset to Paleo is tough at first. The primal aficionado sometimes feels like an outcast, like a kid at the adult dinner table. But before you think it's too much, think on this: Your health is like a balance sheet. Everything you do — every single choice you make — is debited or credited; it either improves your position or worsens it. And your health, to put it simply, is nothing more than the accrual of all the decisions you've ever made.



What we're saying here is that health is a choice. Strength is a choice, too. And your job is to do everything you possibly can to continuously improve your position.

The Paleo community has a mantra: “Live long. Drop dead.” The implication of this statement is that as long as you live in accordance to the blueprint set forth by our ancestors, then you live a life relatively free of ailments. We add the phrase “live strong” to this mantra for two reasons: (1) We find that strong people, as Greg Glassman once so eloquently put it, are “generally more useful than weak people,” and (2) they are, without question, quite harder to kill.

Paleo Fitness: Discovering the Difference

Most conventional dietary and fitness plans are conspiracies against mankind. They offer little in the way of reasonableness or sustainability and are largely set to fail from the start. But Paleo has changed the game by going

in the opposite direction. And the Paleo diet has become nothing short of a welcome phenomenon, helping hundreds of thousands of people all over the world lose weight and restore health. As you discover throughout this book, Paleo fitness works in much the same way. It reverse-engineers the habits of the proverbial cave man and makes them applicable to modern life.

We've taken the brakes off success simply by reversing direction. Now you, too, can quickly achieve optimal health, strength, and vitality when you mimic the physical behavior of our ancestors — our way, way back ancestors, that is.

Paleo fitness success story: Peter

Meet Peter, 24, security officer; Oshkosh, Wisconsin:

As a lifetime athlete, Peter used to rest on the belief that he could compensate for a somewhat questionable diet through massive caloric burns in practice and competitive environments through grade school and high school. When Peter got into his college football career at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, he sustained a major concussion early in his sophomore year. Not being able to work out because of the injury paired with a feeling of deep depression, he turned to pizza, cake, and doughnuts to help him cope with the pain, but these choices were harming him more than helping him. Having prolonged symptoms from his head injury stretch out beyond six months, Peter's weight ballooned up close to the 390-pound mark. When Peter thought he finally felt better, he attempted a light workout only to have extreme feelings of vertigo and a sharp pain where his spine met his brain stem. After some reoccurrence of this feeling, he sought the medical advice of numerous doctors who all told him the same thing: His bad cholesterol paired with high blood pressure brought him mere seconds away from having a stroke if he would have continued to exert himself, and Peter was only 21 years old!

Being utterly shaken by this news from the doctors, Peter decided he was going to wise up. And it was around this time that Peter discovered Paleo fitness, introduced to him by a close friend. He began walking long distances until he could begin to jog, and then Peter began to run and sprint short distances. He began to pay far more attention to not only how his body was reacting to subtle changes of movement but also how he fueled his body. Peter instantly noticed a change when he began ingesting wholesome, Paleo foods and followed a Paleo fitness regimen. What surprised Peter the most was that with very simple, conscientious changes in his lifestyle, the weight simply fell off in mass.

Paleo fitness has led Peter to some truly amazing outcomes and milestones along his journey to full body health and wellness. Peter has lost more than 120 pounds and is feeling healthier than ever! What Peter has been most proud of, however, are the strength gains he has made over the course of the journey. The Paleo fitness lifestyle has also led Peter to develop the overall fitness level necessary to excel in physical fitness testing for police departments in his home state of Wisconsin.



Paleo fitness is just as old as it is new. You can discover everything you need to know about how to achieve the body of your dreams by looking at the lifestyle of our Paleolithic ancestors.

With few exceptions, all progress in the realm of fitness since the era of the cave man hasn't really been progress at all. People have added many nuisances and plenty of distractions in the past 2.6 million years, no doubt, but few true advances.

In fact, humans are the unhealthiest and fattest they've ever been. And sadly, this steady rise in obesity has convinced some scientists to suggest that we may experience, for the first time in history, a decline in life expectancy in the 21st century. Does this surprise you?

Opinions on effective solutions to this problem vary, seemingly, by year. But the truth is that everything that could ever be known on how to live a strong and healthy life is already known — that is, we already know what we need to do to live a long and healthy life based on how our ancestors lived. Any distinct contributions made since then and henceforth amount to very little.



Humans are naturally designed to be strong and healthy. So to look, feel, and perform your best, you have to do the things you were designed to do. This book lays it all out for you.

Patterning Life after the Cave Man

The cave man was perhaps a perfect role model for health and exercise because he didn't try to improve something that was virtually faultless. He followed his genetic programming: He moved how he was meant to move and ate how he was meant to eat. He was fit and healthy.

In the domain of exercise today, fads come (and just as often go) like pimples on a teenybopper. Most of these crazes are, at best, useless, but quite a few have even grown to be dangerous, which concerns us. Our concern lies in not only poor movement but also the gross lack of desire, or priority, for strong, beautiful movement.

Only a handful of popular fitness practices approach exercise this way. Most make people move but fail to first show them how to do so. Many fitness programs make the conventional assumption that people just know how to move, or that they know how to move well. However, for most, quality movement is like writing cursive — an elegant skill that gets sloppy without practice.

Too many people don't give enough respect to strong, beautiful movement. We admit, however, that although most conventional fitness fashions neglect strength and movement quality, they do serve a hidden but useful purpose: They remind people of our values and why this book is important.

In the following sections, we introduce these values in the form of principles as they pertain to Paleo fitness and how they can help you achieve a leaner, harder, and more resilient physique. Understand that many of these principles directly contradict conventional fitness practices — that’s the point.

Conditioning yourself for something other than exercise

The first principle of Paleo fitness states that the most basic and appropriate function of exercise should be to condition someone for something other than exercise. Whether that something is a sport is of small significance. Exercise is, and should remain, a means (a method) to an end (a goal), but many conventional fitness practices forget this detail, because they take the means (exercise) and make it an ends (a sport or competition).

Exercise should be a means to health. Exercise should promote health and vitality — and never, under any circumstance, should it ever detract from that. When that is covered, you may then explore exercise as a means to other ends, such as for spiritual purposes or athletic enhancement.

The harm comes when people turn exercise into a competitive sport. Quality is swapped for quantity, and people get hurt. Exercise should make you better at all things, at all times, and in every way. Anything else simply won’t do.

Getting just the right amount of exercise

The second principle of Paleo fitness states that exercise is best served in small to moderate doses, which is to say just enough to get the job done and not a smidgeon more. But again, conventional practices overlook this detail, made clear by the number of people who spend hours every day trudging on treadmills and spinning on bicycles. Practices that create a chronic state of stress on the body are ill suited for sustainable bodily profits, not to mention wholly ineffective for long-term weight loss. Again, exercise should make you better at all things, at all times, and in every way.

Now the “right” amount of exercise is entirely relative and subjective, but in most cases, it’s probably a lot less than you think. See the section “Keeping it simple: The secret to a good fitness program” for details.

Promoting beautiful movement

The third principle of Paleo fitness states that exercise should promote beautiful movement and stimulate a positive hormonal response. Just as trudging

on the treadmill is equal to committing biomechanical treason so is crushing yourself day in and day out by lifting weights. One promotes a dysfunctional movement pattern (gait) and the other a negative long-term hormonal response (overtraining). But conventional fitness practices manage to overlook this detail, as big-box gyms pummel the masses with a less than choice exercise selection. Injury rates are high and retention low. Go figure.

With Paleo fitness, you marry beautiful movement with beautiful food, which results in a strong, beautiful body.

Keeping it simple: The secret to a good fitness program

Any exercise (and nutrition) program will improve in direct proportion to the number of things that you can keep out of it that don't need to be there. In other words, the secret to a good exercise program is to strip it down to the fewest possible parts — the fundamentals — and leave it at that. Paleo fitness is all about simplicity.

The fundamentals of Paleo are simple and proven effective. All you have to do is follow a simple diet of meats, eggs, fish, veggies, nuts, seeds, and *some* fruit. Then move often and move beautifully, lift heavy every couple of days, and occasionally run for your life (just not on a treadmill).

The secret is to practice strength selectively. We estimate that about 20 tried-and-true exercises — which probably amounts to less than 5 percent of all the exercises out there — are guaranteed to get you 95 percent of all the results you could ever want.

And just as you carefully choose how to move, be selective in what you eat, too. You need to eat less — not necessarily fewer calories but less variety and less frequently. Eat the same Paleo foods often, but eat them infrequently.

When it comes to fitness, we agree with the saying “all change is decay.” Keep it simple with the fundamentals, and you'll do all right.

Getting Results: The Paleo Payoff

Although we'd love to say that following the Paleo fitness program is easy, successful lifestyle changes seldom come without their trials and tribulations. However, we promise that this book, and the workouts contained herein, will return to you exactly what you put in. The returns are 1:1, precisely. And that's the best you'll find anywhere.

Paleo fitness is grounded in good science, and good science produces predictable and repeatable results — that is, what can happen to one, can happen to all. In this section, we review some of those expectations — and results.



With Paleo fitness, you get out of it exactly what you put in. We give you everything you need to succeed, but ultimately, your success depends on your ability to take action.

Seeing is believing: Visual results

Most people want results and want them now. But nothing worthwhile ever comes fast and easy. The problem here is improperly set expectations. People are promised “fast and easy,” but when they don’t get it, they quit. This isn’t what Paleo fitness is about. We’re not selling any delusions here, only proven and sustainable methods — all of which require a considerable amount of effort on your part.

Now to address the most pressing question about any fitness program, the answer is, yes, you absolutely will lose weight with Paleo fitness. And the process won’t be long, tedious, or painful, either. In fact, with the Paleo workouts in this book, six-pack abs are not only easily obtainable but almost inevitable. This result is merely a consequence of moving you into your ideal body fat range, which for men is between 8 to 12 percent and for women, 16 to 22 percent. (If you’re unsure of your body fat percentage and want to get the most accurate reading, we recommend seeking out a facility that has a BOD POD body fat measuring device. Otherwise, you can simply hire a trainer who knows how to conduct a 7-point caliper test.) Then all you have to do is stick to the program.

Paleo fitness helps build your strength, too — not bulky strength but real-world functional strength. In other words, you’ll gain the lean and wiry strength of a cave man, which is a good thing because life is easier when you’re strong.

You may also expect noticeable changes in movement quality. Your everyday flexibility and mobility will improve when you begin to mobilize. Stiffness will turn to suppleness, and you’ll no longer feel as wound up as a spring or as tight as a wheel clamp.

What’s equally exciting is how you’ll feel on the inside. With Paleo fitness, you’ll notice stark differences in sleep quality, energy levels, and mental focus. Expect to beat that sluggish feeling once and for all — without the danger of harmful supplements or unnatural energy boosters.

Knowing what's going on behind the scenes: Other results

Equally important to looking your best is feeling your best. And we think you'll be delighted to experience all the benefits of Paleo fitness that extend far beyond the realm of "looking good naked."

For example, when you incorporate Paleo workouts into your life, you'll experience fewer illness and ailments. The Paleo diet has come to be known for its marvelous ability to boost immunity — and these effects are only greatly enhanced when you add Paleo fitness into the batter. And if you suffer from allergies, don't be surprised if they start to alleviate, too. Results such as these are typical.

To give you an idea, here's a brief list of what you can expect to improve through Paleo fitness:

- ✓ Hunger control
- ✓ Blood sugar regulation
- ✓ Improved joint and bone health
- ✓ Alleviated allergies and less sickness
- ✓ Increased energy levels and concentration
- ✓ Enhanced cellular function and physical performance

A Primal Primer: What You Need to Get Started

The cave man was a minimalist. He was a simple man and enjoyed simple things. His language displayed no fancy technique; in fact, he spoke in clicks, "tsk tsk" and "clop clop." It was horse talk mostly.

The cave man's diet was also quite unpretentious. He ate mostly tubers (yams, radishes, and rutabaga), fish, and game meat. No sugar, and very little, if any, grains or dairy.

When referring to the cave man, we think "hunter-gatherer," but it's probably more accurate to say "scavenger-gatherer," meaning he picked meat from carcasses and preyed upon easy prey — namely, the dead or pretty much dead. A bit crude, and perhaps a tad less dignified, but who are we to judge?

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the cave man had a higher percentage of muscle than people do today, because of his intense and often heavy physical labors. The cave man would often walk, sprint, hang, hinge, squat, push, pull, throw, and carry. Because of this, the cave man was lean, strong, and durable — a product of hard living.

All of these things are lessons mostly on how to eat well and how to move beautifully. In the following sections, we outline what you need to get started on your Paleo fitness journey.

Going low-tech for high impact

We've searched long and hard, up and down, over the river and through the woods, but nothing we've ever come across on our quest for physical excellence has yet to impress us as the human body itself.

You can gain strength, power, and aesthetics — vastly superior to that of the average individual indentured at the big-box gym — quickly, safely, and inexpensively through a choice selection of primal bodyweight exercises. Paleo fitness demands that you unplug, disconnect, and go low-tech to reap high yield. In fact, the primal exercises requiring little to no equipment often produce the biggest results and need no warming up to.

For example, take the wonderful elasticity of the push-up: an exercise that can be tailored to any individual at any experience level. The beginner who lacks upper body strength may start by performing the push-up on an incline (against a wall), whereas the veteran may perpetually challenge and elevate his strength via the one-arm push-up or the one-arm one-leg push-up.

If there's a most important distinction on why Paleo fitness focuses heavily on bodyweight exercises, aside from their astounding cost-to-benefit ratio, then it's because they're both easily scalable and progressive:

- ✓ *Scaling* exercise is either toning it down or blaring it up. For example, the push-up is easily scaled in difficulty by increasing or decreasing the angle (elevating the hands or the feet), or by adding or subtracting limbs (two-arm push-up versus one-arm push-up), or most simply, by adding or subtracting repetitions.
- ✓ Providing a *progression*, on the other hand, is to provide a clear and logical path toward advancement or a higher skill. And to progress to the push-up — that is, to do a push-up properly — you need to start with the plank, similar to how you first learn to crawl before you walk.

In other words, progressions is learning how to do something, and scalability is making something doable.

Most conventional fitness practices offer scalability (making something easier or harder) but little in the ways of progressions (teaching how to do something properly). And that's a dangerous game to play. However, we offer both.

Choosing the kettlebell to enhance and extend

The kettlebell is a brutish but brilliant device. It's a hunk of iron with a handle slapped on it: ugly, heavy, superb.

When used properly, the kettlebell merely forms an extension of the body, and because you can swing it, throw it, carry it, press it, squat it, snatch it, jerk it, lunge it, and so on, it's the prime implement to mimic the rigors and heavy lifting of a primal lifestyle.

The kettlebell also fills in the few holes left behind by bodyweight training. To wit: The kettlebell is a tool that, when employed properly, will help you move powerfully, efficiently, and gracefully.

In addition to your own bodyweight, you can use any number of tools to mimic the labors of the cave man, but not all of them do the job quite as well as the kettlebell. In other words, for any given task, a plethora of tools may help you get the job done, but you need to choose the tool that gets the job done best, and that is the kettlebell.

Although you can do many of the workouts in this book with body weight alone, using a kettlebell enhances and extends your movement so you get better results, faster. And lucky for you, we show you just how to use the kettlebell and use it well to make the most of your Paleo fitness journey.

Getting rid of the "necessities"

Necessary for the participation in any given conventional fitness routine is a list of stuff that's always pretentious, expensive, and wrong. These are the "must gets," or what many may label as true necessities for fitness; they include fancy footwear, highfalutin apparel, exaggerated supplements, affected heart rate monitor — and so on and so on.

But if you want to work out and work out well, the truth is that all you need is a pulse. Everything else is either a bonus or a distraction.

The Paleo fitness aficionado is an ultra-light traveler, toting only the bare minimum necessities, and aims to mimic the cave man, who was, after all, a fitness vagabond (if there ever was such a thing). His gym was all of Earth. He cared nothing for dumbbells as he lifted stones, logs, and carcasses. He cared even less for treadmills as he sprinted regularly outdoors to hunt and to avoid being hunted. And besides, he'd have nowhere to plug one in.

So with Paleo fitness, our list of “must gets” is mostly short and, aside from a set of kettlebells (see previous section), already complete. However, we provide you with a list of “must get rid-ofs” in the following sections.

Ditch the shoes

By now, you may have begun to notice a trend in the Paleo community that began picking up steam a few years back with the release of a book called *Born to Run* (Vintage), where author Christopher McDougall makes a sound enough argument for barefoot running. Now, we're not for long, trudging runs. We don't think long runs are all that good for you, and we have evidence to support this theory (which we roll out in Chapter 9). Nevertheless, the occasional jog that's both light and bouncy is a marvelous way to keep on the move. And save for a few unusual circumstances, it's best performed barefoot.

So are we saying that you should dismiss shoes from your feet and embrace an entirely barefoot lifestyle? The answer is no. That'd be silly. Shoes were invented for a reason, such as to avoid stepping on glass, nails, and jagged rocks, so they still serve a purpose.



If you've been in shoes all your life, ease your way into barefoot running and lifting. To avoid injury, you must give your feet, ankles, and calves ample time to adapt. Don't do too much too soon.

When it comes to Paleo fitness, barefoot is the way to go for these reasons:

- ✓ **Greater support/stability:** Exercising and lifting weights in shoes, particularly shoes with a lot of cushion or heel, is almost like lifting on a mattress. It's unstable. And when it comes to lifting heavy things, you want the most stable base of support you can get. When you ditch the shoes and go barefoot, you can root yourselves to the ground and secure a more stable position.
- ✓ **Better lifting form:** Few shoes are designed with heavy front squats or dead lifts in mind, so few shoes promote proper lifting mechanics. For example, a shoe with a lot of heel naturally edges the weight forward — toward the front of the foot — which is precisely where you don't want it to be when squatting, lunging, dead lifting, and so on, because it translates to greater stress on the knees and the low back. Consequently, when you ditch the shoes, you may shift your weight back toward your heels and lift more from your hips and less from your knees or back.

- ✓ **Stronger feet, ankles, and calves:** Shoes put the muscles of the feet, ankles, and calves out of work, either in part or in whole. In turn, they grow weak and dysfunctional, which puts you at a higher risk for injury. Without shoes, the artificial support is gone and your lowermost extremities must go back to work, so they grow stronger, and you're less likely to fall into injury.
- ✓ **Increased proprioception/bodily awareness:** The bottoms of your feet have sensors that pick up and transmit valuable information to your brain about your position and orientation in space — called *proprioception*. Shoes often distort or misinterpret these signals, and subsequently, the quality of your movement suffers.

The less shoe, the better, we say. But if for whatever reason you can't go strictly barefoot, then opt for minimalist footwear, such as Vibram Five Fingers, New Balance Minimus, or if you're feeling bold, a pair of flip flops.

Cancel the gym membership

Do you need a gym membership to implement a Paleo fitness program? Not at all. Will it help? It can't hurt. If nothing else, it can provide equipment such as kettlebells, dumbbells, and barbells, for your Paleo fitness journey. Just be sure to steer clear of the equipment you don't need, like the treadmills, ellipticals, and exercise machines.



We're quite keen on working out outdoors, and there's certainly something to be said about training *alfresco*. It's primal. It feels good. And you get your daily dose of sunlight. Whether you choose to cancel your gym membership is entirely up to you, but we encourage you to break your Paleo fitness routine out into the sunlight every now and then.

Dismiss preconceived notions

One last thing to purge before you begin your Paleo fitness journey is any and all preconceived notions that you have about fitness and health. You'll soon find that Paleo fitness is marked by minimalism, which is precisely what makes it such a good fitness program.

In fact, Paleo fitness has in it all that you look for in a significant other but rarely find. It's uncluttered and unfussy. It never tires you unfairly. And when you need some time off, it doesn't make you feel guilty about it.