**Paleolithic, Hunter-Gatherer Diet**

This is one of the more fascinating of the diet plans to come forth in recent years. It is based on some of our most ancient eating patterns-the "caveman" or "caveperson" diet. These people belonged to nomadic tribes and mainly used caves for winter shelter.

This hunter-gatherer diet of the Paleolithic humans, our ancestors who inhabited Earth some 40,000 years ago, has been carried on in many tribal cultures. Recent archeological findings suggest these ancestors of ours were a healthy bunch with strong bones, and body structures like modern athletes. As long as they survived accidents, infections, and childbirth, their life span was similar to ours, but with much less chronic degenerative disease.

Further studies show some of the food and life habits of these early human beings. They had regular vigorous exercise applied to hunting and gathering their food for survival. Flesh foods provided proteins; fruits and berries were available for quick energy; and some starchy vegetables provided more complex carbohydrate fuel.

The theory behind the health benefits of this hunter-gatherer diet, called the "Paleolithic Prescription" is that our modern diet should be adapted more to that of our ancestors than to the current one commonly consumed. The grains, eggs, and dairy foods, though wholesome in many ways, are the most common allergenic ones, and create both evident and hidden problems in many people.

A big reason for much of the chronic disease in our culture involves the large amounts of fats, especially saturated fats, which were nearly nonexistent in ancient times (free-running animals had a much lower fat level, and most of the fats were of the polyunsaturated variety). The high intake of refined foods and grains in general also may be problematic in modern humans.

The Paleolithic Prescription suggests an avoidance of refined foods and recommends that the main animal foods be closer to the wild game of ancient times. It includes fish and free-range poultry, obviously with low chemical application to the raising, cultivating, and preparation of these foods.

The average tribe's food consisted of about one-third hunted food to two-thirds gathered, so it was a primarily vegetarian diet that varied seasonally and had added high-protein, low-fat meats based on hunting success.

Besides the various wild game available at that time, the majority of the food consumed consisted of the following uncultivated vegetable foods:

fruits nuts leaves berries

stalks melons beans bulbs

flowers tubers seeds roots

The evolution of our current diet began when organized agriculture began. Which led to the increase in whole grain foods, especially wheat. Animals were domesticated and sheep, pigs, and cattle provided various meats and milks that have been used throughout the centuries.

Chickens and their eggs were also eaten. These new and richer, fattier foods are thought to be at the source of many of our chronic degenerative diseases. The whole grain foods are also the common allergenic foods, as are cow's milk and chicken eggs.

The Industrial Revolution is only 200 years old and added another dimension to our new modern diet, that of refined foods and the use of chemicals in our foods. This is a big problem. Many modern disease may be a result of a mismatch of our genetic makeup and our lifestyle. These diseases are sometimes called "afflictions of affluence" or "diseases of civilization." These include atherosclerosis, hypertension and heart disease, heart attacks and strokes, adult-onset diabetes and cancer.

Following a hunter-gatherer diet is not an easy task today. Grains and milk products are readily available, and the two common foods, wheat and cow's milk get into a great variety of foods found in our commercial stores, but wild game and uncultivated vegetable foods are not found in our supermarkets.

Meats are domesticated and high in fats and potential chemicals. Most all grains and vegetables are cultivated and sprayed with pesticides and other chemicals. More organic foods and meats with lower concentrations of chemicals are not easy to find.

So, it is a chore to adapt our diet and eat in a way that's close to our ancestors. Some suggestions for eating this more natural diet will blend together Paleolithic nutrition with some more modern foods. This will clearly reduce fat intake and reduce the incidences of many of our "diseases of civilization." We should bake, roast, and steam our foods instead of frying or sautéing them. Eating raw, organic foods is also helpful.

We need to reduce the fatty meats and all processed meats as well as most of the whole milk products.

* We can eat a good breakfast of whole grain, fruit and juice, or skim milk.
* Lunch is a good meal that we prepare and eat at home or carry to school. It may include a protein like fish or poultry with vegetables or a sandwich and soup.
* Dinner is a lighter meal of raw salad and soup. Late eating is minimal and our main beverage is water. Exercise is as key an issue for good health as is diet.

Our Paleolithic brethren had a good level of physical activity incorporated into their daily lives. If we are tilling, planting, growing, and harvesting our own foods full time, we all experience that similar benefit, especially if we did a little distance running as the ancient hunters did. Our exercise program should provide a balance that leads us to our optimum weight, good strength, and adequate endurance-and should be an integral part of our life-as it was with most of our ancestors.