

The
— Slim Palate —
Paleo Cookbook



Joshua Weissman

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Slim Palate
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written and photographed by
Joshua Weissman



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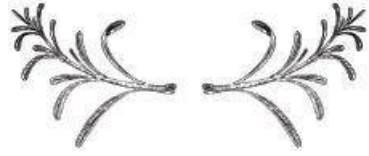
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introduction

As a little boy I loved to cook. I would stand at the ready in the bustling kitchen, helping with every task I could as my anticipation for the meticulously prepared feast swelled. There are even photos of a 4-year-old me with a chef's hat the size of my torso towering over my head.

Unfortunately, as I got older, I drifted away from these practices to try other things, and I fell into a pattern of unintentionally poor eating that caused me to slowly gain weight and become obese. School grew difficult for me due to extreme ridicule and physical harassment from other students. I began to realize how much being overweight plagued me daily and was causing me to be increasingly unhappy. From age 9 to 14 I lived through this torment until, at the age of 15, I decided to change everything. I completely transposed my eating habits almost overnight and began eating real foods with consideration rather than labeled “diet” foods. Slightly more than a year and a half passed, and I lost over 100 pounds (see before and after picture [here](#)).

This journey rekindled the love for cooking that I'd had as a child. Back in the kitchen, I took it a step further and started my food blog, Slim Palate, which flourished thanks to the kind and generous real-food community. Eventually it led to this cookbook that you hold in your hands, a cookbook in which I can share my recipes and my story in a way that I hope everyone can enjoy and learn from.

In America and some other places (but not many, to be honest), people have a massive disconnect with food. This void—a void that I fell into myself—seems to be swelling at a rapid rate. Without realizing it, people have turned away from real, whole foods like meats, vegetables, and fruits in favor of packaged foods that are dense with processed carbohydrates and sugar. These foods line supermarket shelves, with labeling gimmicks designed to make people think that they are healthy choices. The average person is much more likely to pick up a box of Wheat Thins than a zucchini in an attempt to live healthier, which to me is rather baffling.

The biggest mistake I have ever made was to disconnect with real food. Because reconnecting was such a key component of my journey, I want to help others reconnect, whether you want to know more about your food, become healthier, or lose weight.

If losing weight is your goal, then I need to set one thing straight right off the bat: Losing weight is not easy, especially as you get closer to your goal. And the more weight you want to lose, the harder it gets. That doesn't mean you should fear stepping up and trying to make a change, though. I promise you that I didn't get it right the first time, or even the first few times. Take it head on, and let good nutrition be your pencil and time be your eraser.



frameworks to reconnect with food

My goal in writing this book is not to tell you how to eat, start a new way of eating, or launch some “celebrity diet.” However, I do believe that there are certain places people should begin in order to learn how to listen to their bodies and reconnect with food. It doesn’t come naturally to some people, myself included, so it is helpful to have a framework—more specifically, to have guidelines so that you can learn which foods make you feel good and perform well. The Weston A. Price Foundation and Paleo/primal ways of eating are great places to start and learn—or even to remain for a lifetime.

Weston A. Price Foundation

Weston A. Price, sometimes called the Isaac Newton of nutrition, was a dentist. In the late 19th century, he began studying the relationship between diet and dental health. By the 1930s, his research had led him to conclude that real, whole foods, including the fat-soluble vitamins found exclusively in animal fats, contribute to both dental and overall health. The organization that bears his name promotes eating nutrient-dense whole foods such as organically grown produce, grass-fed and pastured meats, and raw grass-fed dairy. To learn more about the Weston A. Price Foundation, visit westonaprice.org.

Paleo/Primal

This way of eating is similar to the Weston A. Price Foundation’s but eliminates grains, legumes,

and in some cases dairy. Paleo promotes the idea that we should be eating what the human body was designed to eat based on what humans have been eating for thousands of years. People who follow a Paleo/primal diet avoid foods that were unavailable in the Paleolithic era, prior to the advent of agriculture and the cultivation of grains. This means no bread, no oatmeal, no quinoa, no beans; just real, whole, nutrient-dense vegetables, fruits, meats, nuts, and seeds. Many people boast of the health benefits of eating Paleo, from enhanced workout performance to simply feeling amazing every day. If you would like to learn more about Paleo, there are many excellent websites devoted to it, including robbwolf.com, marksdailyapple.com, and chriskresser.com.

No matter how you choose to eat, the most important thing is to eat real, whole foods and find what makes you feel your best. During a lot of my weight loss, I followed the Weston A. Price guidelines, but I switched to a Paleo way of eating about three-fifths of the way through my journey, which made a significant difference in my physique and overall wellness. After eating Paleo for a while, I began experimenting with some of the foods I had eliminated to see what my body could and couldn't tolerate. I have found a way of eating that works for me that I continue to explore and expand.

eat fat fearlessly

One of the keys to my losing weight and becoming healthier was abandoning my fear of fat. I can understand if it takes someone a bit of time to get used to the notion of not fearing fat, because I had an incredibly difficult time believing it, too. I avoided fat like the plague—especially after being told my whole life that fat is bad for you. Health “experts” suggest that if you eat fat (especially saturated fat), you will get fat and develop heart disease. But what if I told you that much of what you have been told about fat is wrong?

If you look at human history, levels of heart disease and obesity began increasing dramatically only when refined carbohydrates and refined sugars began showing up in foods and on store shelves everywhere. Natural animal fats began being vilified in 1961 when *Time* magazine published an article based on the work of physiologist Ancel Keys and his now-famous *Seven Countries Study*. Keys analyzed participants from more than twenty-two countries for correlations between saturated fat consumption and heart disease, yet he included only seven of those countries in his graph. Including only seven out of twenty-two countries made his hypothesis appear correct, so his study was published. If he had included the other fifteen countries, no correlation would have been proven. Keys' study—a combination of biased and bad science—essentially started the whirlwind of saturated fat demonization.

In the real-food community, which includes the Weston A. Price Foundation and Paleo, Keys' study has been well discredited. A growing number of health practitioners are expressing disbelief in Keys' study and are trying to bring opposing viewpoints into the mainstream, but to little avail—at least so far. The fact that saturated fat makes up a significant portion of our cell membrane structure should be a trigger to take a step back and consider that saturated fat is something we may not want to eliminate from our diet. Not to mention that some of the supplements recommended by so-called “health experts” contain essential fat-soluble vitamins

such as A, D, and K2 that are found in high concentrations in saturated fats like grass-fed tallow and butter. While it's fairly obvious that I am not opposed to the consumption of saturated fat, I'm just pointing out another reason that the crusade against saturated fat and especially animal fat seems misguided and not very well thought out in many cases.



One of the reasons this notion goes unchallenged by the mainstream “health industry” is that saturated fat contains cholesterol, a natural substance that our bodies happen to produce. The argument is that the consumption of saturated fat increases cholesterol levels, and high cholesterol leads to heart disease. Well, it's true that saturated fat consumption can increase cholesterol, but it increases *total* cholesterol. Yes, LDL (bad cholesterol) goes up, but so does HDL (good cholesterol). Many studies show no correlation between total cholesterol and heart disease. In other words, there is no evidence that the consumption of saturated fat and cholesterol-rich foods increases heart disease risk. In fact, if you look at the course of America's health, the rate of heart disease has risen dramatically since Americans began severely limiting saturated fat. Compare that to countries like France and Spain, where rates of heart disease are low, while saturated fat intake is far from limited. In countries where people eat a lot of animal products and/or saturated fat and do have higher risks of heart disease, there are other contributing factors that could lead to heart disease.

Nowadays, the general consensus on fat is moving in a more positive direction; doctors and the FDA are talking about the good fat in foods like avocados, nuts, and olive oil, also known as monounsaturated fat, having positive effects on heart function and weight stability. But they still leave out saturated fat.

I'm making a point of this because as soon as you start incorporating healthy fats like avocados, nuts, olive oil, and yes, even animal fats, the easier time you will have feeling full and satisfied without overeating. Eating real food without fear frees you from feeling hungry all the time, while you burn fat or just feel healthier. So rejoice, and enjoy cooking with tallow, lard, butter, and whatever other animal fats you please. Take pride in that satisfying bite of fatty and juicy rib-eye or crispy-skinned chicken thigh, because life isn't about eating nothing but broiled chicken breasts and steamed broccoli.

Now, despite what I've said, I am not advising you to eat unlimited amounts of fat. There is such a thing as too much; it's just incredibly difficult to eat too much fat if you're eating properly already. Unless you're downing quarts of melted lard all day long (which I don't think is even possible), I'm not worried about your fat intake. Use your satiety and common sense as a guide, because everyone is different in terms of what they should consume. If my explanation is not

thorough enough for you, I highly recommend reading up about saturated fat and cholesterol on websites like westonaprice.org, chriskresser.com, and marksdailyapple.com, all of which provide substantial amounts of sound information regarding this debate.

the calories in, calories out myth

Letting go of calorie counting was another key to my weight loss success. The prevailing notion is that as long as you are expending the same number of calories that you eat in a day, you won't gain weight. This hypothesis may seem legitimate (it has a bit of truth to it, but only in certain situations), but it's far from correct in my experience. What is really important is a system of hormones that decide whether it is okay to release fat. One of those hormones is insulin, which is produced in the pancreas and controls glucose metabolism and absorption by cells.

Now, insulin isn't a bad guy; in fact, we need it to live. In a physically fit person, insulin drives nutrients into the muscles, also known as glycogen stores. Glycogen stores are depleted through physical activity, like a workout. After you work out and deplete your glycogen stores, your body can deal with an insulin spike and utilize that insulin to drive those nutrients into your muscles. Insulin typically spikes when you eat foods that are higher in carbohydrates or sugar. Because so many people who are overweight eat a diet high in carbohydrates and sugars, their insulin levels are probably chronically high. And because they are also not as physically active as they should be to match a diet so rich in carbohydrates and sugar, their glycogen stores are probably already full when they eat a carb- and sugar-rich meal. The problem is that once the glycogen stores in your muscles and liver are full, you end up with excess glucose (sugar) in your system, and your body must find a place to put it—most commonly in fat cells and stored as triglycerides. In simpler terms, excess glucose in the body causes fat to be stored because insulin can't find anywhere else to put it to use in the body.

That said, the body metabolizes complex carbohydrates much more slowly than simple carbohydrates like table sugar, fruit sugar (fructose), and honey. Simple carbohydrates (sugars) are put into glycogen stores immediately. Sugars can quickly fill up liver glycogen stores, leaving the muscles empty and allowing excess glucose to raise blood sugar levels. So if you eat lots of simple carbohydrates (sugars), you're going to hit your storage limit much faster than you would with complex carbohydrates. In other words, if you were to prioritize the consumption of these two things, you would want to limit sugar much more heavily.

This is why the calories in, calories out hypothesis is rather ridiculous: it implies that you could essentially eat your day's worth of calories with the bulk of them coming from carbohydrates, both simple and complex, and not suffer any negative effects. Now, this might be possible in a physically fit person who is very active and is putting that insulin production to use through depleted muscle glycogen stores, but what about a person who isn't physically active? Despite the fact that this person *may* be eating within his "proper" caloric boundaries, he could easily be spiking his blood sugar far too much for his activity level, which forces his body to turn excess glucose into body fat. But what if you're working out *and* eating within your proper caloric boundaries, albeit with a high ratio of carbohydrates? Here's the thing: Your body will make

every effort to burn off the sugary food you're eating before it bothers dipping into stored fats for energy. This means that, while your blood sugar levels might be more stable than those of an inactive person eating a similar sugar-rich diet, it's likely that you still won't be burning fat or losing any weight. This is a situation that a lot of people find themselves in, thinking that they can simply work off everything they eat, which isn't always the case.

I wanted to keep this discussion short and to the point to avoid overwhelming anyone with the science, but if you'd like to learn more, there are sources out there that explain how this works in great detail, such as the book *Why We Get Fat* by Gary Taubes and websites like marksdailyapple.com and chriskresser.com.

carbohydrate consumption for those who actually want to lose weight

People tend to be very interested in exactly how I ate during my 100-pound weight loss because it worked so well for me, but I can't sit down and explain it to every person who asks. My goal isn't to make this a diet or weight loss book, but I do want to take a moment to help those who wish to lose weight by sharing what I know and what has worked for me. Just be aware that this section isn't targeted to you unless your objective is to lose weight.

While I strongly support eating real food for general health, it isn't that simple when it comes to losing weight. Yes, real food needs to be the focus of your diet, but the assumption that *all* real food will help you lose weight overlooks a couple of specifics. Just because it's real food and not processed doesn't mean that it will help you lose weight, even though it may keep you healthy. This is the problem I experienced before I started regulating my carbohydrate and sugar consumption and was just counting calories and fat grams: I wasn't gaining weight, but I wasn't losing any, either.

For example, because I thought it was healthy, I had a medium smoothie from a local smoothie joint every day after my workout. Now, the smoothies I was consuming did fit into the calorie count I had set for myself, but each one also contained well over 80 grams of sugar and 100 grams of carbohydrates. Obviously, the sugar and carbohydrates were impeding everything. Believe it or not, even the natural carbohydrates and sugar in fruit are a problem for an overweight person when it comes to fat loss. Sugar of any kind in abundance, even if it's raw honey, organic fruit, or organic cane sugar, can keep your blood glucose level too high, thus causing your body to store fat rather than burn it. The second I learned that, I started moderating my carbohydrate and sugar intake and began integrating more healthful fats like avocados, nuts, extra-virgin olive oil, and animal fats into my diet, and I noticed real progress. By reducing and moderating your carbohydrate and sugar intake, you can lower those insulin spikes, leaving your body room to burn fat rather than hold onto it. This is exactly why low-fat diet meals that are full of carbohydrates and sugars rarely help you lose weight. I tried all those diet meals, and none of them worked for me.

After studying several books and articles, I found *The Belly Fat Cure* by Jorge Cruise to be the most useful to me. From a weight loss perspective, I highly recommend this book for anyone who is new to this. If you know nothing about Weston A Price or Paleo, start here, and then, if you so choose, move toward Weston A. Price or Paleo way of eating. Through my own experimentations and by utilizing methods from this book, I devised daily carbohydrate and sugar limits for myself. While I don't agree with all of Jorge's methods, he has an incredibly well-designed plan for carbohydrate and sugar consumption if you aren't ready to try anything very-low-carbohydrate (although I do recommend that you try going progressively lower-carbohydrate and see how it goes). I tried to eat only 110–120 grams of carbohydrates and 14–16 grams of sugar per day, including the sugars and carbohydrates in fruits and vegetables. In fact, I avoided fruits like bananas and apples entirely and stuck to blackberries, raspberries, and blueberries, which are significantly lower in sugar and carbohydrates. I tracked carbohydrates and sugars simply by adding them up throughout the day. To keep the math from being too much of a hassle, I tried to make sure that I ate no more than 40 grams of carbs and no more than 5 grams of sugar per meal.

You can certainly go *lower* than 110–120 grams of carbs and 14–16 grams of sugar a day; those numbers are limits, not goals. Don't strive to eat 40 grams of carbs or 5 grams of sugar at every meal, either; just be sure not to go above those limits if you're trying to lose weight. In fact, you could go even lower to something like 30–50 grams of carbs a day; that level may even be ideal for some people.

Granted, counting is really necessary only for those who are not going Paleo. If you try the Paleo way of eating, you will be much less likely to overeat carbohydrates or sugars. It's still possible to do it unconsciously, though, if you eat too many high-sugar fruits or starchy vegetables. Just be sure you know which foods are high in carbohydrates and sugars, and minimize your consumption of those foods.

Always read labels and look for added sugars, additives, and preservatives among the ingredients. Just because something is Paleo does not mean that it will help you lose weight or burn fat—just look at those “Paleo” treats that pack 10–30 grams of sugar into a small single serving. When I pick up something that has a nutrition label on it, the first three things I look at are the ingredients and then the carbohydrate and sugar numbers. You can use websites like calorieking.com (for the macronutrient profiles, not necessarily the calorie counts) and nutritiondata.self.com to find the sugar and carbohydrate counts for practically any fruit or vegetable, seeing as most whole fruits and vegetables do not have a nutrition label. If you don't know the serving size for something, a good general rule is that a serving of fruit or higher-sugar vegetable (like beets or carrots) should be the size of your palm and a serving of a lower-sugar vegetable (like broccoli or mushrooms) should be the size of two palms. You could definitely go higher and be more exact; this is just a simple way to look at it.



Basically, what I just explained was how I ate to achieve my success. There is no one-size-fits-all way of eating, of course, and I'm not certain that low-carbohydrate eating would be sustainable for the long term for everyone, but I do believe that it could be beneficial to most people for a certain period of time. For example, if you were eating a lower-carbohydrate diet and it worked wonderfully, but then stopped working so well after a while, I think it's clear that you might need to make some changes, such as reintroducing more carbohydrates. It's all about being unafraid to keep experimenting until you find something that works for you.

ingredients

terms you should know

Although I define many terms in the coming pages, I am including some key definitions here to give you a foundation for understanding the information that follows, along with a few terms that I use often in the book that may be unfamiliar.

GMO

GMO is an acronym for genetically modified organism. GMOs are organisms whose genetic material has been altered to make them grow faster, be hardier, and even kill off bugs when they eat them. This manipulation can cause the organisms' genetic material to become unstable. The United States does not require companies to label whether an item is genetically modified or might contain GMO ingredients, even though GMOs are considered unsafe in many developed countries.

organic

A label established by the USDA guaranteeing that no hormones, antibiotics, synthetic pesticides, GMOs, or synthetic additives were used in the making of a product.

organically grown

This term typically applies to produce and other items that are commonly found at farmers' markets. It implies that the product was made in accordance with organic standards but does not have the official organic label. Organic certification costs a significant amount of money, and some farms are unable or unwilling to pay for it.



umami

Umami might seem like a bizarre word, but I urge you to add it to your vocabulary. The word has Japanese roots and translates to “pleasant savory taste.” Although its translation is rather plain, umami means much more than that. It’s actually one of the five basic tastes; the other four are salty, sour, bitter, and sweet. It’s directly related to the glutamate receptors in the body, which could be considered the body’s sense of deliciousness—the kind that wakens your mind and makes you want to go back for another bite. It’s somewhat like that ahh feeling when you step into a warm bath, but in the form of taste. Glutamate is found in different foods at different levels; this is why certain ingredients that are naturally higher in glutamate have more umami in them. These high-glutamate ingredients include fish sauce (one of my favorites), tomatoes, mushrooms, and cured meats like bacon. In the late 1800s, one of the world’s most influential chefs, Auguste Escoffier, was one of the first people to utilize umami in cooking, although he didn’t know the chemical source of it at the time. Later, in 1908, a Japanese scientist named Kikunae Ikeda identified it chemically and later gave it the name umami. This explanation may be long-winded, but that is how significant umami is to me!

foodie

A foodie is a person who has a tenacious love for food but is past the point of simply enjoying it. Foodies don’t seek out food just for convenience or in response to hunger. Instead, they search for experiences and adventure through taste. Foodies typically have strong feelings toward certain foods and ingredients and can usually be relied on to join in on a restaurant run, though they are sometimes considered snobbish about food.



sourcing meat

Many scientific studies suggest that we humans evolved to eat meat, and I tend to agree. Despite arguments that people make against the decision, eating meat can be healthful, sustainable, and ethical. You simply have to know what to look for and where to look. Many high-ranking chefs and foodies claim that how an animal is raised and what it is fed are among the most important factors that determine how flavorful and nutritious the meat is. Before you buy meat, make it a priority to know how the animal was raised and what it ate.

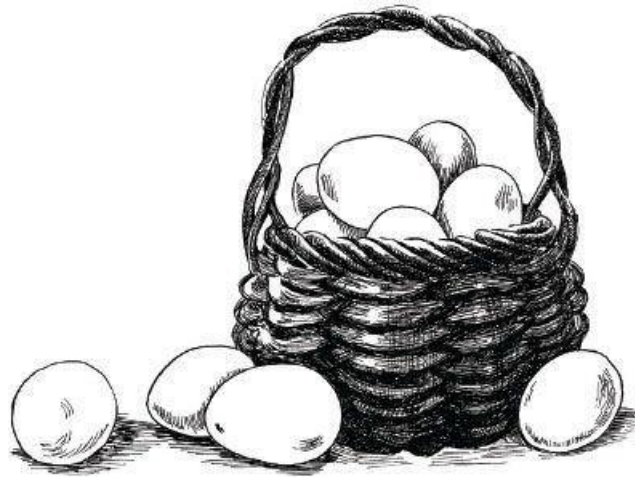
pastured poultry, eggs, and pork

Poultry is a widely used term that defines all things bird. When it comes to poultry (including both meat and eggs) and pork, you want pastured.

Pastured tends to get mixed up with other terms like free-range and cage-free. As similar as they might sound, they couldn't be more contrasting. Pastured animals have the freedom to roam a pasture all day and live where they please. They're allowed to forage for food such as insects, grass, and other plants. (Many farms that raise pastured birds or pigs supplement with feed, which is acceptable because birds and pigs can eat and digest grains, unlike ruminants like cows and lambs. *Supplement* is the keyword here; the feed shouldn't make up the majority of their diet if you want truly pastured meat.) Sadly, terms like cage-free and free-range are just labeling gimmicks. Cage-free or free-range birds aren't caged, but instead are often crammed into large pens with no room to move. Of course they don't explain that part on the label.

You may have noticed that I didn't list organic pork or poultry. Organic certification is great for many reasons, but it is often used as a labeling gimmick. It's good because it ensures that no antibiotics or added hormones are used in the product and that the feed is organic, but it doesn't guarantee that the animals are raised properly, like being on pasture. I suppose you could consider pastured poultry and pork as being beyond organic. I have such a great local source of

pastured meats that I don't buy organic meats anymore, but not everyone has a source for pastured meats. If your only choice is organic, know that it is much better than conventionally raised pork or poultry, which is commonly full of synthetic hormones and antibiotics.



I prioritize pastured poultry and pork over organic, but if you do not have access or are unwilling to pay the premium, here's a list of how I choose to prioritize these meats:

1. Pastured

This is what I recommend to people who really care about the health benefits and flavor of their meat. You are most likely to find pastured meats through a local farmer, and it would be unusual to find any that is not antibiotic and hormone free. Because the animals live on a pasture, they have stronger immune systems and are less vulnerable to disease, so antibiotics are unlikely to be used. The excellent thing about purchasing from a local farm is that if you are concerned or curious, you can talk to the farmers and find out everything that goes on with the animals. They should be confident in answering your questions, whereas a corporation might not be.

2. Organic

Organic meat is far better than conventional, but why all the labels like vegetarian-fed, free-range, and so on? Pigs and poultry are omnivorous; therefore, they shouldn't be fed a vegetarian diet, if you ask me. The benefit of this choice is that a vegetarian diet ensures that no antibiotics or hormones were given to the animals and that they were fed an organic feed that is likely corn and soy based but is non-GMO and pesticide free. On rare occasion you might find organic pastured meat, but it's not easy to come by, and it's likely to be more expensive than pastured meat purchased from a local farm.

3. Natural/free-range/cage-free

In my opinion, these are labeling tricks that have people going head over heels for no reason. These terms make you think that the animals are at least given some time to move and suggest that they are not given antibiotics or hormones. Movies like *Food Inc.* have revealed that companies have used this label in misleading and fraudulent ways. If you choose meat labeled natural, free-range, or cage-free, try to get to know the company or farm you're buying it from so you know exactly what you're getting.