



An Interview With Nikki Young, Author Of "The Paleo Cookbooks"

Interview with [Fitness Spotlight](#)

What is your health and fitness philosophy? What made you adopt a Paleo lifestyle?

I came across CrossFit, Ross Enamait and Zach Evan Esh sometime back in 2005 and really enjoyed their style of training and believed in the methods and concepts and have since incorporated that training style into my own programs. I have trained with isometric exercises before, but in further educating myself began to lean towards the effectiveness and benefits of functional movements and the health & weight loss benefits associated with high intensity training.

Incorporating this method of training didn't go down to well with some of the other personal trainers in gyms I worked in. On one occasion, I was yelled at for about 10 minutes because I expressed my views about putting clients on a smith machine to do squats - that same trainer didn't even say hi to me for the rest of my time working there. Haha!

I have always had an interest in nutrition, even more so now that I have educated myself on the importance of nutrition for good health. I first heard of the Paleo Diet when jumping on the CrossFit forums and I began following it almost straight away.

When you began cleaning up your eating, did you notice immediate performance improvements? When I started following a paleo diet I also changed up my training, so I noticed the benefits of both the nutrition and the exercise simultaneously. Definitely during the first few months I felt fantastic, my energy had increased and I could feel my fitness improving dramatically. I put a lot of those improvements down to the way I was eating, as I never felt those kinds of improvements in my energy and training when previously following a fairly unhealthy diet and training hard.

Tell us a bit about your background? sports you play/played, how long you've been training, the various training programs you've used, etc

I've always enjoyed training and participating in sports. From a young age I was really good at swimming and had a keen interest in trying out every sport I could. In primary school I loved tennis and trained often, I won a few tournaments and began training with more advanced players but my interest sparked for soccer when I started high-school, so I joined a local club with a few friends. Around a year later I was selected to play State soccer.

I really enjoy mountain bike riding and ride regularly. My interest in conditioning and general fitness training came when I began researching more into the fitness industry and came across CrossFit and the trainers mentioned above. My fitness program changes depending on how I'm feeling and what I feel like doing, currently I'm training with Kettlebells and mountain bike riding - but next week I may just want to run, do max lifts or follow some CrossFit WOD's.

How did you come to be a 'Paleo Chef'? Have you always enjoyed cooking?

I have always enjoyed cooking, my parents and grandparents taught me how to cook at a young age and I thank them for that. I probably started cooking Paleo meals when my Mum found out she was allergic to many non-Paleo foods, including gluten (cutting out most grains) and dairy. I have always had an interest in nutrition and when I first came across the Paleo diet I could immediately see how it would support a healthy lifestyle. I then began to focus on cooking meals which were 100% Paleo friendly and altering meals to only contain Paleo ingredients - which didn't always work out.

When educating my clients on the Paleo diet they would always say something like "but what can I eat if I can't eat grains?". So I started to put recipes together for my clients to help them with ideas - these recipes plus a bunch more have formed into the [Paleo Cookbooks](#).

I'm a firm believer that eating right 90% of the time and enjoying yourself with some smart indulgences the other 10% of the time is the best way to put together a healthy life that still allows some leeway. How do you feel about this and what are your indulgences?

Most definitely. I feel if you tell yourself you "can't" have something you will want it even more. So if you start following a paleo diet and tell yourself you will never again have a chocolate biscuit then you will probably crave them more than you ever have before. Sometimes cheating can make you realise how good you really feel when eating healthy, especially if you over-indulge.

My favorite non-paleo meal would definitely be a vegetarian laksa followed by chocolate. When you think about it, 10% of your diet doesn't equate to that many cheat meals. If eating three meals a day with 10% leniency, then only around two-three meals out of twenty one will be cheat meals.

I'm going to put you on the spot here - how would you rank order the non-Paleo foods in terms of best to worst?

Anything that is highly processed and contains little to no nutritional value will jump straight to the top of the list as the worst foods: sweets, chips, desserts, breads, pasta and most supermarket milk that isn't raw and is highly processed.

Canned vegetables are often not thought of as paleo due to the added preservatives, added sodium and the loss of nutritional intensity. I would put these around the middle of the rank for 'non-paleo' foods. If rinsed well they are better than not eating any vegetables at all. I would also put foods such as nut bars, or fruit and nut mixes which are around 70/30(ish) paleo /non-paleo ingredients around the middle of the rank. Nut bars for instance will contain lots of nuts but will also contain sugar and other ingredients to help bind and add additional flavour.

Probably at the bottom of the rank and the most acceptable would be foods which are controversial as being a paleo food or not. Sweet potato for instance isn't 100% paleo due to needing to be cooked to be edible, however they still contain nutritional value even if the GI is quite high. Bacon is meat, yet will hold a lot of added sodium so is avoided by many 'strict' paleo dieters. Goat's cheese and goat's milk is generally not as highly processed as other dairy sources, but I believe dairy can be beneficial to good health if the produce is from a healthy animal and not highly processed.

I would also mention the fermentation of non-paleo ingredients. Probiotics which are formed through the fermentation of some form of grain or soy will hold a lot of beneficial nutrition while the negative nutritional attributes are significantly reduced.

You're short on time and need to get in a quick, but healthy meal. What's your fall-back plan?

I would usually get some nuts. Just because they can be found almost anywhere. My first option would be some fruit but if that's not available I will buy some nuts / nut bar and drink lots of water. I try not to put myself into a situation where I don't have food on hand or access to something when it's meal time.

What did you have for breakfast today?

I will pretty much always have 3 eggs for breakfast, supplemented with two JP+ vegetable capsules and three fish oil/CLO capsules. To break things up, I will sometimes have left over dinner for breakfast, which is usually something like chicken or mince patties with vegetables.

What's your favorite recipe?

Hard question! I have a lot of favorite recipes, my main ones though would probably be: eggs with salt, fried dry, no oil (that's not really a recipe! I think I just love eggs), chicken curries, Bolognese (mince) and red cabbage salad.

And finally, do you have any quick tips for people wanting to lose weight or adopting a Paleo-style diet?

Probably the two most important factors when dedicating yourself to following a diet / exercise program is mental strength and education.

Following the paleo diet isn't the hardest nutritional program you will ever follow, but if your mental determination to succeed drops then you will find yourself 'cheating' with bad foods early on as soon as you get a craving or fall into an emotional state. Even if it is one meal, it can ultimately make it harder to continue with the diet, especially if you feel you can't even stick to it for a week.

Depending on your diet prior to deciding to go paleo, the first few weeks can be the toughest. If you can fight through the sugar cravings and plan your meals every day then you are going to do really well. After the first few weeks you will feel fantastic and eating high-sugar, low nutritional foods will make you feel horrible.

When it comes to education, the more you know about good nutrition, exercise and living a healthy lifestyle the easier it will be to achieve and maintain. Mainly because you actually know what you are doing and you can do it right.

I recommend reading books and articles recommended from a reputable person/source initially; only because there are thousands of books on nutrition out there which recommend eating a very un-healthy diet, i.e. the fruit diet. The worst thing you can do is educate yourself on eating a diet which is un-healthy and believing it because you don't know any better.

There are so many good books out there which really make you think about how you are living your life. I would recommend anyone wanting to achieve optimal health to read the book 'Never be Sick Again' by Raymond Francis and Kester Cotton and also talking with people you trust in the industry to pass on some solid reading recommendations.

Thanks for taking the time to answer my questions, Nikki!

[The Paleo Cookbooks](#) contain 310 delicious recipes using the foods our ancestors thrived on for the last 200,000 years. No-hassle, easy-to-prepare recipes- made with wholesome, nutrition-packed ingredients that will fit any budget.