

Making Paleo Practical

Nikki Young Interviews Adam Farrah



Adam Farrah is an IKFF Certified Kettlebell Teacher and CrossFit and Paleo Diet coach. He's an active blogger and has a B.S. in Chemistry from the University of Connecticut.

How did you get started in the health and fitness industry?

I've trained and done martial arts for most of my life. About 3 years ago I had a real awakening and realized I needed to LIVE health and fitness full-time and teach others as well. I just got to the point where I realized I wasn't going to be happy unless it was a full-time, all-consuming pursuit. At about the same time I did an IKFF kettlebell teacher certification with Steve Cotter and Ken Blackburn and started teaching kettlebells. I taught a kettlebell seminar at a CrossFit gym and became good friends with the owner and that was that. Since then I've just been immersed in it all constantly – teaching, writing, working on myself as an athlete, learning to be a better coach.

When did you first hear about the Paleo diet, and decide that it was right for you?

I came to the Paleo diet from a completely different direction than most. I started suffering from digestive issues in my late 20s and early 30s. I had to learn to treat myself since the mainstream medical approach is only about medicating symptoms. I KNEW diet was a big factor – even though all the doctors I saw said it wasn't – and I was determined to figure out how to eat so I could get healthy again.

Eventually I found “Restoring Your Digestive Health” by Jordan Rubin and that started me down the path toward Paleo. Rubin's approach is basically Paleo with the addition of cultured goat's milk products like yogurt and kefir. He doesn't call it Paleo though, so it took a lot more reading and research to find the common threads in ALL healthy diets and realize that there is a single “right” way to eat for humans with a few variations for genetics, etc. That right way is Paleo.

The part of this whole story I love is, here I am eating this “wacky” diet with no grains, organic meats, raw dairy, etc. and thinking I'm stuck eating to reverse a health condition as opposed to eating for strength and performance like I used to and then I slowly enter the CrossFit community and see that Paleo is a “performance” diet too. In the end, it turns out that a healthy diet is a healthy diet regardless of goals. You can't perform if you don't have a foundation of health from a proper diet and lifestyle.

Your blog is a great resource for people wanting to continue, or start their education on health, exercise and a healthy lifestyle. If you could define the absolute fundamental attributes people should have/do in their life to be healthy what would they be?

Reduce Negative Stress. This is an absolute fundamental.

I don't really believe in “stress management” because I think that term takes it as

a given that everyone's life is full of stress and that's OK. Some stress is unavoidable and some stress is good because it helps us grow and expand our comfort zone, but I think the majority of people today have a massive overload of negative stress in their lives.

I define negative stress as being chronic and exhausting to the body, mind and spirit. An example would be feeling stuck in an unsatisfying career, dead end job or being in the wrong field entirely for who you are on a deep level. Another would be having stressful, negative or emotionally challenging people in your life – particularly in intimate relationships. Another situation I see a lot is just this “constantly connected” lifestyle where people have 3 phones, 20 email addresses and are constantly pointing and clicking and texting and talking and moving. We're just not made to live that way any more than we are made to eat grains and processed junk.

So, to answer your question in a broader sense, I think a certain level of “knowing oneself” is necessary to live in a truly healthy way. If you're unhappy in your work, stressed in your relationships or constantly looking “out there” for something to make you happy, there's really no way to create true health in your life – no matter what diet you eat.

I think lifestyle is an all-encompassing topic that includes the “simpler” things like diet, rest, proper training, etc. but also has a much deeper and more spiritual meaning. This is the key to good health as far as I'm concerned.

In practical terms, do some self-development work and find out if you're really living the life you would want if you could choose anything. If you're not, get to work on making positive changes. I highly recommend some type of spiritual/energetic practice like yoga, meditation or Qigong. If you can't quiet your mind long enough to focus during these types of activities – as I couldn't in the beginning – it's very indicative that you're restless on a deep level and that can create an obstacle to true health in the long run.

What are some of the biggest mistakes and learning curves you made when beginning your journey to good health and fitness?

There's actually a big one that I still make! It's getting the ego too involved in training and program design. The “less is more” philosophy is something I still don't adhere to very well in my own training. You have to know when and how to push your limits but you also have to stay within recovery abilities and a sensible program. You see this problem with most CrossFitters in general. It's the Type A personality in action.

Do you see these being made by a lot of clients you work with as a coach?

Absolutely! I always try to get my clients to see the big picture and look back at where they came from as opposed to how far they are from their ideal. It's a lot easier for me to do it for them than it is to do it for myself.

As a coach you really have to walk the line – particularly with CrossFit. A lot of people show up wanting to get absolutely pounded in their workout. You have to give them that sense of satisfaction each time – of having worked really hard and pushed limits – but you also have to keep them on the right track with regard to overtraining and what's healthy for the body and what they can recover from. You can't go hard 100% of the time. The body can't do it.

How do you deal with that in your clients on a practical level?

I individualize everyone's program as much as possible. Even within the group classes. I also have a good sense of when someone is approaching burnout and will dial back their workload to keep them healthy. I also incorporate periods of skill work with more technical lifts. This necessitates light weight and the excitement of learning and perfecting something new and difficult can offset the "loss" of the big endorphin rush you get from a really hard workout.

My goal is to develop healthy, technically proficient, fast and strong athletes. Each of these goals has a trade off that affects the others, so it's a very fine line.

Are there other good sources of kefir available if people don't have access to raw milk?

In the US, there's a brand called Redwood Hill Farm that makes goat dairy products. They have milk, yogurt and kefir. The products are pasteurized but I still find them very useful and easier on my system than cow dairy.

There are other cow and goat kefir products out there, but people should be very mindful of the ingredients. Some companies add sugar and other stuff to their products that should be avoided.

You are a big advocate for functional strength; can you explain why functional strength and performing functional exercises is important for the human body and what the best 5 exercises are that you recommend everyone should perform?

I think this goes back to fundamental principles just like the Paleo diet. Our bodies are designed to move in certain ways by evolution and these movement patterns are very important to health and performance. We didn't evolve sitting on a padded seat using our muscles in a restricted plain of motion or walking on a treadmill any more than we did eating processed foods, sugar and grains.

Like a Paleo diet, when you get into these "primitive" movement patterns, all sorts of good things happen.

My Top 5 exercises would be:

Squats – barbell and un-loaded
Kettlebell Swings
Deadlifts
Cleans – Med Ball and Barbell
Kettlebell Turkish Get Up – especially for Brazilian Jiu Jitsu

I have to qualify those recommendations with the statement that it's really essential to have a good coach and learn the proper form on them BEFORE increasing the load. My clients have hours and hours of technique work included in their training and warm-ups. I'm always refining technique on these fundamental movements.

Is there any information you wish you had when you were first starting out?

Yeah. A lot of the information that didn't exist at the time. All the functional movement stuff, Paleo diet, the lifestyle factors needed for health. The CrossFit movement and community has been big for me. The internet and the Paleo, CrossFit and kettlebell communities have really made a huge difference in my understanding of health and training. It's a different world than it was 10 or even 5 years ago.

What's your favorite way to stay Paleo when you're on the move?

I do a lot of intermittent fasting, so a very easy way for me to stay Paleo when I'm out and about is to simply fast. I'd actually rather fast for half a day than make a bad food choice at this point. I also find my mental acuity is much higher in the morning and when fasted. I try to keep the earlier part of my days high on activity, training, thinking and working and the later part of the day slower, more restful and with a higher food intake.

Could you share one or two of your favorite paleo recipes?

One of my staples is a Goat Yogurt Smoothie:

- 1 Cup of Goat Yogurt
- 3 Raw Organic Eggs
- 1 Cup of Organic Fruit (strawberries, bananas, peaches, etc.)
- 1 Tbsp Coconut Oil

Just put them all in a blender and blend them up!

I also do a lot of omelets and egg dishes. A lot of times I just fry some bacon and whatever other meat and vegetables I have around and scramble in some eggs. I don't measure or weigh things much.

Your blog is called "Practical Paleolithic." What's the significance of that?

I've been on some variation of a Paleo or primitive diet for over six years now. My diet and lifestyle developed over time and there was a lot of trial and error and experimentation involved. I think there is a lot of theory and a lot of "shoulds" regarding diet and health and this is one of the things that really tripped me up in the beginning. Everyone's body and everyone's life experience and situation are different. My goal is to give people the tools and the knowledge to create a diet and lifestyle that works for them as individuals – one that is practical to them on every level – that fits Paleo diet and health principals.

There are a number of intelligent and excellent authors in the Paleo field and the alternative health fields in general, but I find many of them get too attached to theory. My approach is all about empowering an individual to make health decisions on a personal level based on all the available information. The last thing I want to be is another "talking head" telling people what to eat and what not to eat. There's already too much of that.

So what if goat kefir works for me? It might NOT work for someone else with different genetics, metabolism or lifestyle. If I go around telling everyone that goat kefir is the best thing in the world I'm only taking my own experience and generalizing it. Even if I based my approach on the individuals I coach, that group is still going to self-select (by staying rather than quitting) as responders to my approach. No single approach works for everyone and to think there is one rigid approach is naive, idealistic or both.

I think it's important to take our guidelines from the huge body of knowledge we already have – and that others are still working to build and refine – and create an individualized diet, training program and lifestyle for each person and their situation.

As a last question, what are some realistic long-term and short-term goals you would recommend people aim for when looking to start an exercise regime along with a healthy dietary program?

The goals always depend on the individual. In general terms, I think it's really important to focus on short term goals and be sure you're heading toward them. It's also important to realize how small the steps we actually take are when working toward a goal. It's all about constant refinement and improvement.

Short term training goals would be things like: mastering the basic functional movements like squats, cleans, deadlifts, kettlebell swings and get ups, etc., getting consistent about training and getting to the gym and constantly learning and reading about training. Short term diet goals are really about cleaning things up and getting better and better at making it “normal” to be eating Paleo. Get a good collection of recipes that you like and are easy for you to prepare, eat less and less junk or non-Paleo stuff, have fewer and fewer cheat days, etc. I’m six years in and I’m STILL learning and refining and getting better at finding good local foods. It’s a lifestyle and you have to approach it that way.

Also, set goals for eliminating negative stress in your life. Stress makes a real mess of the hormonal systems and that alone can really slow – or even completely stop – your progress. Some people have more stressful lives than others, but I think as a culture we’re moving toward higher and higher stress levels and the attitude is that it’s OK. It’s not and we’re going to see more and more problems related to this in the coming years. Try to make your lifestyle as Paleo as possible.

Nikki really did a great job putting her [Paleo Cookbooks](#) together. They’re well organized, beautifully laid out and have something for every taste preference. I was a chef for years and I STILL learned some great stuff from the Paleo Cookbooks. In particular, I eat a lot of eggs and all the omelet recipes and variations really gave me some great new ideas.

Thanks again for putting together two great cookbooks, Nikki!



~ **Adam Farrah**

Author of Practical Paleolithic, CrossFit Coach and IKFF Kettlebell Teacher

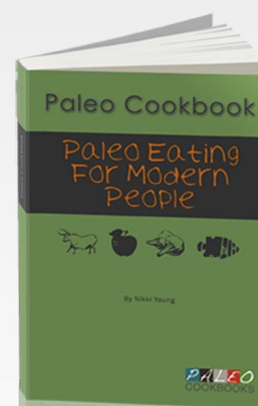
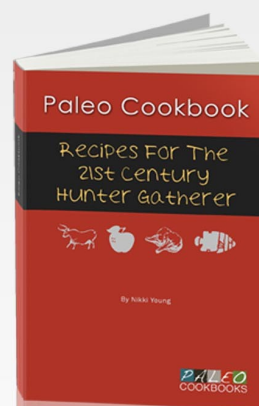
The Paleo Cookbooks provide you with a range of dishes for every occasion - from light no-fuss meals through to dinner parties, family celebrations and summer salads.

Using foods provided by Mother Nature that provide the framework and principles for healthy living, these exciting and flavorful recipes using foods which are basic to our biology and our digestive system will help you experience wonderful results in your health and help to achieve positive results such as:

Increased Energy - Increased Sex Drive - Clearer, Smoother Skin - Weight Loss Results - Better Performance and Recovery from Exercise - Stronger Immune System

These paleo recipes are easy to follow and use wonderfully fresh ingredients, with the emphasis on flavor and visual appeal. The Paleo Cookbook provides a wealth of ideas and recipes for a collection of mouth watering meals.

Simple and Easy to Create Recipes with clear step by step instructions you will be able to produce paleo friendly meals that get rave reviews from friends and family every- time!



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