



Paleo Diet and Organic Eating with Antonio Valladares

Nikki Young interviews Antonio Valladares, author of Healthy Urban Kitchen Cookbook

When did you first begin believing in the benefits of following a paleo diet with organic produce and what experiences and health benefits you have achieved?

I started eating organic food as young kid growing up in Miami in the 1980's. I had actually been sick a lot as a child and saw all sorts of doctors, specialists and was in the hospital several times with severe gastrointestinal problems for more than 20 years and no one had an answer for me.

I was a vegetarian for 15 years and ate a whole foods diet. However, once I found out I was gluten and dairy intolerant, everything changed. Around 2002, I gave up dairy (except butter) and all grains and saw radical improvements in my health.

I stopped grains and dairy and started eating grass fed meat, wild fish and pastured poultry and eggs and felt better than ever. I had much more energy, greater focus, mental clarity, I got leaner, stronger and most importantly, I resolved my digestive issues.

A poor diet can significantly disturb the balance and function of the human body. What are some of the greatest improvements in health and well-being you have seen in your clients after improving the nutritional quality?

Living in NYC, I get a lot of clients who have damaged their metabolism from years of dieting, or from food/drug/alcohol/sugar addiction. Many people are addicted to caffeine and it wreaks havoc on the hormonal system and tweaks brain chemistry. I help women get off SSRI's (antidepressants) and restore normal brain & body chemistry. You need clean animal fats and coconut oil to do this the right way.

I help clients recover from adrenal fatigue (hormonal imbalance) and correct serious digestive issues.

Many of my clients come to me after seeing previous trainers, therapists or doctors. These so called 'experts' couldn't figure out what was wrong with them and certainly didn't teach them how to get healthy. You would be amazed at some of the things I hear from clients who had seen famous nutritionists and the 'best' trainers or NY doctors.

Many young women feel lousy due to a faulty diet and because the majority of people around them live the same way, they assume it's normal to go through life like this. Their doctors are quick to put them on drugs instead of teaching them how to heal, get healthy and resolve their issues. As soon as people start eating real food and eating more often, results come rather quickly.

The one consistent solution I have found that delivers the most impressive results is increasing saturated fat and protein in their diet. I have found animal fats from grass fed, organic sources are the single most important food for someone to see radical improvements in overall health, wellness, energy levels and restoring hormonal balance.

Are there any common health issues you have seen overcome in clients once they start following the paleo diet with organic produce?

Recovering from adrenal fatigue and restoring normal menstrual cycles require more saturated fat and protein.

I have found every one with a digestive issue (bloating, IBS, gas, cramps) who gives up gluten gets excellent results. Many digestive issues and some psychological dysfunctions are long term gluten issues.

The simplest and most effective solution I have found is eliminating gluten and eating more fat and protein, particularly from grass fed animals and eggs.

Skin issues usually clear up when they give up grains. Sometimes you have to do more work to clean up the liver and the gut, but many skin issues and seasonal allergies clear up when people start eating this way.

There is some work involved in restoring balance and healing the metabolism, but as far as food is concerned, real food is the most important part and delivers the quickest results.

Is there any particular food that you see the most improvements from when eliminated from someone's diet?

Eliminating gluten, by far, delivers the best results I have ever seen. Pasteurized milk, artificial sweetener, soy, coffee and grains are the biggest ones.

In NYC it's trendy to be coffee addicted and irresponsible with what you eat. Most people are eating muffins and coffee while running to the subway or skipping breakfast all together and they can't figure out what they're tired, depressed, feel like crap or can't lose weight.

Eliminating coffee and grains is challenging for some people because they are highly addictive, but liberating yourself from those two things delivers awesome results.

I hook my clients up with raw dairy products and that helps a lot as well. Getting off pasteurized milk products, especially low fat stuff, helps a lot. Clients who drink raw milk get real good results, especially the teenagers I work with.

If you could name 10 tips on how to achieve optimal health and a healthy lifestyle what would they be?

- Do what you love and love what you do.
- Have clear goals and take action on them 6 days a week.
- Work hard, play hard, rest hard.
- Pay attention to how food makes you feel and adjust accordingly.
- Spend as much time in nature as possible.
- Eliminate gluten, pasteurized milk, sugar, soy, processed foods and reduce caffeine & alcohol.
- Get to bed around 10:30 pm!
- Surround yourself with awesome people who also appreciate health & wellness.
- Eat 4-6 times per day and plan your meals in advance.
- Eat grass fed meats & eggs, wild fish and organic produce as often as possible.

What are your favorite paleo recipes?

- Lamb balls with tomatoes and basil sauce
- Spinach and asparagus soup
- Spinach and coconut soup
- And of course, the Coconut and Walnut Macaroons are awesome

(These recipes plus many more can be found in the Paleo Cookbooks at www.paleocookbook.com)

Food cravings are probably one of the hardest parts to overcome when following a paleo diet. What suggestions do you pass onto clients when they are experiencing cravings at their highest?

Cravings are often a symptom of a deeper imbalance or addiction. Make no mistake about it, sugar is a hard drug.

Caffeine, adrenal fatigue, too much sugar in the diet, insufficient sleep, not managing your emotions and not eating according our biological requirements all can cause sugar cravings.

The most common cause is simply not eating often enough, when your blood sugar drops, cortisol goes up and that will trigger sugar cravings. Also, when your blood sugar drops, you can get depressed immediately, that will also cause you to reach out for sugar to counter balance that since sugar induces a serotonin response that makes you feel good. That's also why so many people are addicted to sugar, they don't manage their emotions and end up eating sugar cause it numbs them out.

A fairly common question people have is what they should consume after a workout, or if they should consume food at all. What are your thoughts and beliefs when it comes to post workout nutrition?

I don't think it's as big of an issue as supplement companies make it out to be.

I say eat as soon as possible after a workout. Yes you can have more carbs at that meal if you want to have sweets, that would be the best meal to do it in. Sometimes shakes are ideal if you're not going to be able to eat right away. I use raw eggs and I also suggest for some raw whey for protein.

There are so many people out there that simply don't understand the link between nutrition and health. How do you help educate clients who are not very knowledgeable in this area?

I think that's the single biggest problem in our world. People don't connect the dots, especially on a daily basis.

The concept of preventing disease is more like a vague idea in the distant future, most people don't really care. But our diet controls our day to day function and most are clueless about how their food (or lack thereof) causes the fatigue, digestive disorders, poor focus, and depression that they experience daily.

I have clients use a food journal and teach them to pay attention to the results from each meal, usually about an hour after eating. Our mental/emotional stability is largely controlled by our diet. When they skip meals or eat crap food, they can see the connections easily in a journal.

Paying attention to your mental/emo wellness and energy levels is an easy way for most people to see the connections right away. People are less concerned about diseases and more concerned about immediate energy issues as well as appearance.

My dad recently visited America and said it was so hard to find food that wasn't processed or packaged. Even a "freshly" made juice was put together with bottled juice and a packaged banana. Do you feel this situation will only get worse in the near future and what are the best ways to avoid these changes in society affecting our health?

Its easy to find real food once you know where to go. It does take some work to know where to go to get real food. You also have to plan ahead if your traveling. Even when I go to the beach, which is only 45 minutes away by train, I still bring a cooler with my own food. It's easier in big cities once you know where to go, but in smaller towns and in the country, real food sometimes doesn't even exist. It's strange.

I think its getting worse and better simultaneously. I think the best thing to do is to eat real food and live by example. There will always be both positive and negative changes in human societies, so the best thing to do is to set the best example and stick to nature. The further one gets from nature, the sicker and more dysfunctional the become. We will always have both sick and healthy people and trends are growing in both directions.

The gut is a great place to look for an idea of how healthy ones body; what is coming out is a result of what is put in. What are some areas you look for in gut health that are signs the body is not functioning optimally and what is generally the cause?

Bloating is the most common issue. Constipation is a close second.

You should be pooping 2 - 4 times per day, roughly a half hour after you eat. If your only pooping once a day, your constipated. If you go for an entire day without pooping, you have problems that need to be addressed.

Bloating is caused by a food that shouldn't be in the gut, most often gluten, dairy or soy. Beer has gluten so more people get bloated from beer than other alcohols.

Stress can also trigger digestive disorders and almost any food you eat when stressed will cause problems.

I teach people to use a food journal and record when they get bloated and trace it to the previous meal so they can start to see trends. You can see patterns or foods that trigger bloating, gas or other problems.

Loud belching and acid reflux is typically the result of a bacterial (H. Pylori) infection which decreases hydrochloric acid production leading to undigested food particles which can leak into the blood stream. Vegetarian diets can also cause the same low acid problem.

The cause of diarrhea is more obvious because it happens quickly, so you generally know what causes it. The other issues may or may not happen right away, so you have to be more aware.

Its also important to not eat while working on computer or watching tv as that is not conducive for digestion. When your stressed or focused, digestion wont be a priority for the body.

Making sure you relax and enjoy your food is critical for optimal digestion and thus you health and vitality.

Supplementation. What are your beliefs in what is good and what should be avoided?

I have extensive questionnaires and do lab work with clients to see precisely what the imbalances are, then I know for sure what supplements they need. I don't guess.

I use supplements when repairing a damaged metabolism or when healing from addiction. For adrenal recovery or other hormonal issues, I use bio-identical hormones. I use strong digestive enzymes, some supportive adrenal supplements and minerals at dinner for some people. It all depends of each person. Sometimes I use a multi-vitamin with someone who is really unhealthy.

I use organic, food based supplements and fish oil as well. When restoring brain chemistry, I use amino acids which work better than any drug around.

As a general rule, I discourage most sports supplements because many have artificial sweeteners which are neurotoxic or they have highly processed protein powders which cause bloating for a lot of people and all sorts of artificial ingredients.

Healthy Urban Kitchen is a step-by-step manual that will show you how to shop, eat and cook healthy food without sacrificing much of your time or your money. The Healthy Urban Kitchen comes with a bundle of free bonuses, including Healthy Fats & Oils guide and interviews with well-known nutritional experts. Every month, you also receive new cooking tips and ideas via e-mail, so you never get a change to become bored with your food choices.



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