

Harmonizing The Paleo Diet and CrossFit To Maximize Health & Fitness

Nikki Young interviews Travis Schefcik



Travis Schefcik is a certified L1 CrossFit trainer who, after being diagnosed with a dangerous heart condition, embarked on a journey to find a way to control the circumstance through diet. After experimenting with the Zone Diet, The Abs Diet, Atkins Diet, and mail order diets, he found the Paleo diet is the ultimate human diet. Now, he writes about the Paleo diet on his site UncommonWellness.com, and he uses the Paleo diet to the success of his clients. One of his greatest enjoyments is watching people transform themselves into lean, energized, and happy people through eating a Paleo diet.

Travis, you're a self-described Paleo and CrossFit Junkie, and for those who aren't sure would you tell us what CrossFit is and how you first got involved?

CrossFit is constantly varied functional movement performed at high intensity. In other words, it a general fitness program which mixes gymnastics, weightlifting, running, and body weight exercises all into one workout.

I got started in CrossFit while deployed with the U. S. Navy to northern Iraq. The guys I seen doing CrossFit workouts were super fit, and they were always changing their workout routine. CrossFit delivers results and I was hooked from the first CrossFit workout I completed.

When did you first learn about the paleo diet and was the nutritional foundation something which made sense to you right away, or did it take some convincing?

I first learned about the Paleo diet in 2008 at the same time I started to CrossFit. It made so much sense so that I overlooked its simplicity of the Paleo diet as probably ineffective. Every diet I had tried up to that time had me convinced that a diet must be difficult and restricting. So it took some time to convince myself to eat a Paleo diet because it was so plain and simple. Sometimes I think we all tell ourselves something must be difficult to work. Not the case with the Paleo diet.

How long before you noticed an improvement towards your health and your CrossFit performance?

Improvements came in just a few days. When I increased my good fat intake based on the Paleo diet my performance sky-rocketed, and I didn't have the ups and downs as a result of blood sugar fluctuations.

The Paleo diet is the recommended way of eating along with the CrossFit workouts, why do you think the Paleo diet works so well with CrossFit?

Eating a Paleo diet decreases recovery time, and gives you sustained energy throughout your workout. CrossFitters are after nothing but the best results and the Paleo diet delivers.

For really competitive CrossFitters and athletes in general, would you change the dietary approach to meet their nutritional and energy needs?

This is a hot topic in the mass media because they push low fat this, low fat that in your face. But, if the athlete is eating a Paleo diet, their energy requirements are met through diet. On occasion, some may add additional good fats (coconut oil, avocado, macadamia nuts) and a bit of starch (sweet potatoes).

What are some of the biggest improvements you notice in people's performance and well-being when they start to CrossFit regularly and really focus on good Paleo dietary habits?

(1) Their energy goes through the roof, which in turn, increases their athletic capacity. It's amazing how hard you can push your body when it's fed a Paleo diet.

(2) Their recovery time decreases dramatically because their body can repair itself more quickly.

(3) Though, the most important improvement I notice is how they feel about themselves. It's amazing to watch people go through the transition into a CrossFit body, but even more, how CrossFit cures their low self-esteem. Not only do they lose stubborn body fat by mixing CrossFit and the Paleo diet, but with CrossFit you'll push yourself hard, harder than most people have ever pushed themselves. And that breeds confidence.

What do you feel lacks in performance the most in not only CrossFitters, but athletes in general, when they eat a modern day diet, high in sugars, grains and processed foods?

The inability to sustain superior athletic performance. Could you imagine the results if athletes who believe sugars, grains, and some processed foods give you real energy tried the Paleo diet? They would be blown away with their results, guaranteed.

In regards to health outside of fitness and performance, did you notice any area of your health improving when first starting to follow the Paleo diet?

Yes! I sleep better, wake earlier (fully rested), and have energy the entire day. Before I ate a Paleo diet, I battled heartburn almost daily, but not since I started the Paleo diet have I had heartburn. Also, and probably most important, I'm able to concentrate and focus better than before the Paleo diet.

At a young age you were diagnosed with a severe heart condition which was life threatening, is this something that you are now managing without medication, and through the changes in your lifestyle and diet?

That was a scary time for me considering my entire immediate family has heart problems of some sort. Before the Paleo diet I had been on medication to control my condition, but now, I do not take any medications; I manage my condition through diet. Once I started the Paleo diet and stopped eating sugars and grains the condition went away.

Did you have any idea back then, or was it something your doctors mentioned to you, that this condition could be treated through your diet without the need for medication?

No, not a single doctor I seen mentioned diet as a cure. The doctors kept pushing drugs. I don't blame them, that's what most doctors are trained to do. But that first trip to the emergency room because I couldn't control my heart beat was an eye opening experience. I knew a better way to control it had to exist. So I started to search for the ultimate diet and found the Paleo diet. How funny it is now to look back at all the absurd diets I have tried in the past.

A lot of people feel following the paleo diet is expensive, in regards to food purchasing, what is often forgotten is the good health that is achieved, and the extra dollars one may pay on groceries now for quality food will mean a better quality of life, and a much lower medical bill over the years. In saying that though, as a husband with a wife and three kids, do you have any tips on eating paleo and saving a few dollars?

Buy in bulk when you can and freeze what you can. Also if you can't afford wild meats, budget for grass-fed beef. Many good choices are available once you learn the basics of the Paleo diet. Talk to people too. Through chatting with my sister about the Paleo diet, one of her friends gave me nearly 15 lbs of venison and elk steaks, roasts, and ground meat. Can't beat free!

What is the best way to start CrossFit and what advice would you recommend to people who are looking at following the Paleo diet?

In CrossFit we have a saying, 3, 2, 1, Go! You can't stall, you have to start. But you have to start smart. And for beginner's that means starting slow. Don't try to keep up with CrossFitters who have been doing it for a long time. I recommend finding a CrossFit gym and joining. You'll never look back.

The way I see it, people have to choices when going to the Paleo diet. (1) start strict, and (2) start slow and ease into it. The strict approach is best, but that doesn't work for everyone. However, you start, do just that, start the Paleo diet. You'll find it's the best diet for our bodies.

Nikki, I wanted to let you know how much I appreciate your cookbooks. The [Paleo Cookbooks](#) are stuffed with easy to make recipes that cover breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. Your cookbooks make a simple diet, even simpler! Thank you for taking the time to put all these delicious recipes together and sharing them with the world!

~ Travis Schefcik
L1 CrossFit Trainer

