Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Unearthing the Paleo Diet for Soldiers

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The Paleo diet is taking our nation by storm, and many of our Soldiers have succumbed to the idea of eating like our caveman ancestors. But is this diet adequate for our nation's finest?

What is the Paleo Diet?

The Paleo diet is based on the notion, if our ancestors didn't eat it, then you shouldn't either. Loren Cordain, author of The Paleo Diet and The Paleo Diet for Athletes, characterizes Paleolithic fare as a lean meat, poultry, seafood, fresh fruit, and veggies- based diet. Foods that do not make the cut include cereal grains, dairy products, high-glycemic fruits and vegetables, beans, alcohol, salty foods, fatty meats, refined sugars, and nearly all processed foods. In a nutshell, the Paleo diet promotes itself as a low-carbohydrate, high-protein diet.

How does the Paleo Diet stack up for Soldiers?

The Paleo diet does offer some nutritional benefit, namely a substantial amount of omega-3 fatty acids, potassium, vitamin C, and fiber. Additionally, it focuses on "whole" and fresh foods, eliminating canned, processed, frozen, and prepackaged foods which are usually laced with sugar, salt, and preservatives. However, Soldiers need to be aware this diet comes at the cost of inadequate calcium. It can be 50 percent less calcium and 80 percent less sodium than suggested by the Military Daily Recommended Intake. In addition, the Paleo diet is insufficient in carbohydrates. This can inhibit muscle recovery following exercise and increase muscle soreness and injury rates. Recognizing this as an issue, Cordain modified his stance on the Paleo diet for athletes to encourage the intake of certain non-Paleo, carbohydrate-rich foods. These include whole grain cereals and breads, beans, and low fat milk or yogurt within prescribed time windows around training sessions.

The bottom line…

People should take caution if they want to begin the Paleo diet. Depending on your training demands, it may leave your muscles under fueled. Post workout fueling is critical to proper recovery and getting the most out of your training. Within 30 to 45 minutes after a workout, consume a meal with a mix of healthy carbohydrates and lean protein. Examples include whole grain cereal with skim milk, a wheat bagel with peanut butter, or some whole grain pasta with lean meat. If you don't have time to eat after training, grab a meal replacement drink or bar with at least 30 grams carbohydrate and 10 to 15 grams protein.