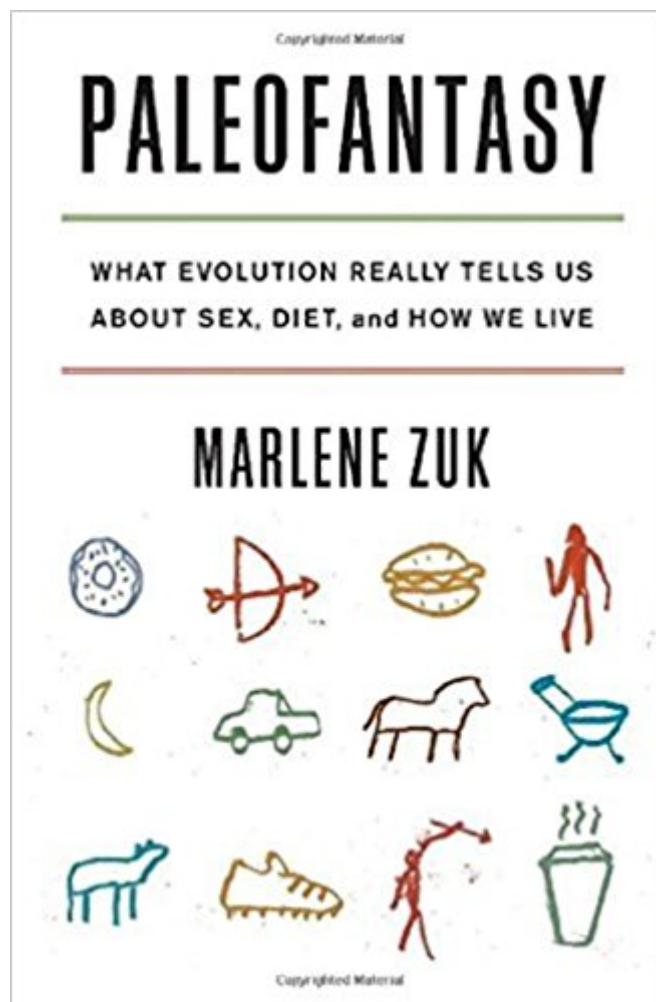


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# Paleofantasy: What Evolution Really Tells Us About Sex, Diet, And How We Live



## Synopsis

“With . . . evidence from recent genetic and anthropological research, [Zuk] offers a dose of paleoreality.”<sup>1</sup> Erin Wayman, *Science News* We evolved to eat berries rather than bagels, to live in mud huts rather than condos, to sprint barefoot rather than play football<sup>2</sup> or did we? Are our bodies and brains truly at odds with modern life? Although it may seem as though we have barely had time to shed our hunter-gatherer legacy, biologist Marlene Zuk reveals that the story is not so simple. Popular theories about how our ancestors lived<sup>3</sup> and why we should emulate them<sup>4</sup> are often based on speculation, not scientific evidence. Armed with a razor-sharp wit and brilliant, eye-opening research, Zuk takes us to the cutting edge of biology to show that evolution can work much faster than was previously realized, meaning that we are not biologically the same as our caveman ancestors. Contrary to what the glossy magazines would have us believe, we do not enjoy potato chips because they crunch just like the insects our forebears snacked on. And women don’t go into shoe-shopping frenzies because their prehistoric foremothers gathered resources for their clans. As Zuk compellingly argues, such beliefs incorrectly assume that we<sup>5</sup> are stuck<sup>6</sup> finished evolving<sup>7</sup> and have been for tens of thousands of years. She draws on fascinating evidence that examines everything from adults’ ability to drink milk to the texture of our ear wax to show that we<sup>8</sup> have actually never stopped evolving. Our nostalgic visions of an ideal evolutionary past in which we ate, lived, and reproduced as we were<sup>9</sup> meant to<sup>10</sup> fail to recognize that we were never perfectly suited to our environment. Evolution is about change, and every organism is full of trade-offs. From debunking the caveman diet to unraveling gender stereotypes, Zuk delivers an engrossing analysis of widespread paleofantasies and the scientific evidence that undermines them, all the while broadening our understanding of our origins and what they can really tell us about our present and our future. 15 illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Working from the assumption that human physiology has remained virtually unchanged since our hunting and gathering days more than 10,000 years ago, advocates of the currently popular Paleolithic, or caveman, diet eschew dairy, grains, and other products of modern agriculture. Some Paleo buffs go even further, promoting barefoot running and sleeping with our infants, arguing that modern living has wreaked havoc on our collective health. For University of California biology professor Zuk, such notions are Paleofantasies, a misinformed nostalgia for a mythical era when humans supposedly lived in perfect harmony with nature. In this illuminating overview of state-of-the art evolutionary science, the author debunks this utopian ideal and demonstrates that not only have humans continued to evolve since our foraging days, but some of those adaptations have been remarkably swift. Zuk draws on emerging evidence from gene mapping and studies on lactose digestion proving that today's humans are definitely different from our caveman ancestors. While Zuk doesn't disagree that a couch-potato lifestyle is detrimental, she offers a reassuring message that humankind is still tweaking its genome. --Carl Hays --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Much-needed. . . . Zuk's nutritionally rich scientific fodder . . . will certainly bring intellectual benefits far greater than those provided by the pseudoscientific confections with which we are so often tempted." - Cordelia Fine, *Wall Street Journal*  
"Ably presents a skeptical and light-hearted view of a long list of paleofantasies and supposed solutions." - John Hawks, *Nature*  
"Briskly dismisses . . . misunderstandings about how evolution works and . . . offers a lively, lucid illustration of the intricacies of this all-important natural process." - Laura Miller, *Salon*  
"Starred review. Thoroughly engaging and witty. . . . Whether [Zuk is] shredding the underlying premises of the paleo diet, the paleo exercise regimen, or the structure of the paleo family, she does so via cogent discussions of the nature of evolution and accessible elucidations of cutting-edge science." - Publishers Weekly  
"Zuk's take on the many controversies and uncertainties surrounding evolution is both wise and measured." - Guardian  
"Marlene Zuk's quest to understand prehistory is an

elegant guide for the perplexed. Paleofantasy cuts through a confusing tangle of facts and claims to give us a trustworthy road map to the glorious problems of who we are and where we come from. - Richard Wrangham, author of *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human*  
"We tend to idealize our ancestors, as if they had the perfect life and perfect diet. In highly readable style, Marlene Zuk downplays our paleo-heritage. Not only did we change culturally, we are also genetically a different animal." - Frans de Waal, author of *The Bonobo and the Atheist*

Fascinating topic. The book is well-researched and compelling, but the author tries to hard to be fun (analogies/metaphors, personal anecdotes, jokes, etc.). It seems like an effort to make the book read more like a magazine than an academic paper, but I just found it awkward and distracting. Still, it's a great read.

I really enjoyed this book. Along with debunking the paleodiet garbage with current research there is a dose of humor injected throughout the book. This makes it a great read.

Paleofantasy is a treasure for all those who are interested, and would like to understand, the evolution of human nutrition. With facts and wit, Zuk blows apart the clouds of the believers. As in her previous books, Zuk brings together the work of international scientists of different disciplines, making the reader aware of the many aspects of evolution and nutrition that have been researched, and what has been revealed as facts. Unlike food fantasies that promote to limit our diet, this book is refreshing to all who love food and take being healthy seriously. It is exciting to learn how our tolerance for digesting milk is part of our evolution, and what was found in the plaque of ancient humans. Zuk's humor makes it so much fun to learn about the facts - and to accept what we do not know. Most of all, Paleofantasy points out how evolution has never been a smooth process, never a time when we, or any other living organism, had been living in perfect harmony with the environment. And we're still in the process of evolution.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It was a nice skeptical look at the idea that we should be living life as closely to our cave dwelling ancestors. Zuk tackles a variety of topics including diet, exercise, and relationships. With every topic she discusses, she takes a critical look at whether or not the evidence shows that the ways of the cave people are best. She also asks throughout the book for the reader to ponder whether or not humans have stopped evolving and, if we haven't, does that

mean the ways of the cave people are still the best. She cites all of her sources which is very nice. Her writing style is engaging yet scientific. Scientist and non-scientist alike should have no problem enjoying this book

The author is careful not to weigh in too heavily on whether the so-called "paleo" or "cave-man" diet is good for you, and doesn't waste time arguing with those who swear it's the only thing that's ever worked for weight loss. Neither does she offer the one true diet/lifestyle alternative that will work for everyone. Rather, she uses her considerable knowledge in the field of evolutionary biology to examine the claim(s) that modern humans "evolved" to eat (and sleep and have sex and live) like a cave man (and by implication, haven't evolved since). Her writing is engaging and smooth, and her sources are well documented. If you know anything at all about evolution, you pretty much know what her conclusion is going to be: it's a little more complicated than the "cave-man" diet/lifestyle advocates would have you believe. Evolution of such traits as the ability to digest lactose or carbohydrates is perfectly possible within the time frames and among the populations where they have appeared. She corrects some of the major misunderstandings of the evolutionary process that seem to be going around (again) lately in the popular science world, and she does so with a sense of humor and without attacking people (paleo advocates, for example) too hard. I highly recommend this book

There are so many fad diets, so many fad programs for improving your health, none based on actual research or evidence. Some may, in fact, be designed only to enrich the person who promotes the diet or the program. Here is a well written, engrossing, eminently understandable response to the so-called "paleo" fad based on actual science and actual evidence. Anyone thinking of embarking on one of these fad programs should read this first.

Mind expanding exposition of the evolution of mankind, past and present, is presented. Examples are given of recent human evolution beyond Paleolithic times. Zuk makes the case that we should not imitate the "cavemen" in diet and exercise. For example, the ability to function at high altitudes and resistance to malaria are recent rapidly evolving human characteristics. I highly recommend this book.

I was about to buy the paleo diet book but looked for a review and bought this book instead. I'm glad I did. This was a fun, scientific and very readable book on a lot of stuff about human nature and

evolution - like is cheating an evolutionary trait - fun book.

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