

## Improve Your Health and Fitness- Go Caveman!

I am going to tell you why you need to behave more like a cave man in order to stay healthier and happier. Read on cave people.....Over aeons of time, our bodies have adapted to cope with survival in a harsh environment. Although we achieved civilization thousands of years ago, our bodies have not evolved to adapt to this change. If we imagine ourselves back in the distant past we would have eaten less sugar, salt and fat in a year or more than we now eat in a week or less. We would have eaten a diet of meat and fish, mostly vegetable matter, fruit, berries, nuts, seeds and roots. We would only have drunk water, and may have sampled the splendour of honey. Foods would be rich in fibre, some protein, essential fats, vitamins and minerals, but low in sugar, salt and saturated fats. We would have been in almost constant motion; playing, working, foraging, preparing food, but rarely staying still. (I think that it is important to remind ourselves that our body is designed to be active, but that we often think of exercise as formal, vigorous, structured pursuits. It can be easy to persuade ourselves that going swimming or playing football twice a week is enough and so we have an excuse for driving to work and to the local shops. And although it is great to do these things, we can stay fit and healthy without a gym membership, just by doing everyday movements; walking, cleaning the house, and gardening, and yes I shall say that well-worn phrase- leaving the car at home.)Don't think that our person from the past would have been feasting on jumbo mammoth steaks Flintstone-style all day long either. Meat may have been in scant supply for much of the time (have you ever tried to catch a rabbit?) and women and children spent a large amount of time foraging for nuts, roots, berries and vegetable matter. Everyone would have been involved in acquiring food, and all methods of obtaining food would have used large amounts of energy; you have to cover wide areas to provide enough food for a family. Even when farming became a way of life huge amounts of energy would have to be invested in producing the fruits, vegetables and animal products. Animals too would have been reared on a diet of more complex foods rather than modern high-energy processed feeds. It is thought that their meat would have been much less rich in saturated fats and so healthier for the people consuming it. Food production would have been part of every day life, unlike today where food arrives pre-packed, smothered in cellophane, produced days, weeks or months ago in a factory hundreds of miles away, glazed with wax, identical in size and colour to its neighbour, lacking any aroma, and likely to be lacking in nutrition. Our imaginary person would have experienced real, largely unprocessed food, and a varied seasonal diet (no strawberries at Christmas for Ms Caveperson). It is likely that they would have a relationship with what they had produced. If you ever grow your own fruit and veg you will understand how exciting it is to watch things grow, then how good it feels to harvest and prepare them. People would have wasted nothing- all parts of every fruit, vegetable or animal would be used for something, almost nothing was unusable; today in the UK one third of our food is thrown away and wasted, out of every 2 bagged salads purchased today, one will go in the bin (sounds familiar?). Another aspect of our imaginary person's relationship to food is the social aspect. People would have produced and processed the food together, celebrated harvests and abundant times, and eaten together as a family or group. Children would help the adults, and learnt how to grow and prepare food ensuring that they would be able to look after themselves as adults. Meal times may have been the only time when the extended family would be gathered together to swap the day's news, gossip and stories. This way people eat more slowly, and eat less allowing their body to feel full and satisfied. Food would have produced social bonding and been a central and essential part of social life. Life would have been hard, and still is for many people today who have to provide their own food, and so I don't want to over-romanticise this imaginary person. However, I think that this person from the past is a useful tool for understanding what our eating and activity profile should be more like if we wish to be healthier and happier. There would have been no slouching on a sofa in front of the TV, no Chicken Dippas, micro-chips, and definitely (and thankfully) no Pringles. Our imaginary person may not even recognise these things as food. Underneath it all we are still cave people, our bodies and brains have evolved to take nutrition from simple whole foods, we thrive on human contact and still feel the need to eat together and share food, and our bodies are healthier if we exercise consistently. We need a diet rich in whole foods, in raw foods, and home cooked foods. We should pick foods which are low in sugar, salt and saturated fat. If you are doubtful about the validity of a food, ask yourself how far-removed it is from its natural state, could you make it yourself, would it have existed a hundred years ago or more? If the answer is no then the chances are that it is not very healthy. We need to explore the excitement of foraging for food, growing it and preparing it, we need to rediscover the simple pleasures of podding peas, chopping fresh herbs, picking blackberries, and making pickles and jams. We can support our 'tribe' by walking down to the local fruit and veg shop, and visiting the local butcher or fishmonger, by using our farmers markets, and supporting local growers. (For each £10 spent in the UK £6 goes into the pocket of Mr Tesco\*; local shops are closing, and farmers are making little money due to the pressure placed upon them by supermarkets). We need to get back to the camp-fire and share family food times together, making eating a natural and loving social event where family and friends can interact and bond. I am not suggesting that you go out and jump on a rabbit and sink your teeth into it, but try to think about the true importance of good food and exercise, and the way that we can improve our health and fitness, enrich our lives and support our community and the environment at the same time. Take a step back in time this week; walk down to the farmers market or the local shops, buy some local produce, take it home and cook it carefully for some people that you love. Unplug the TV and have a good long dinner by candlelight, taking time to talk and enjoy the food. I guarantee that you will feel healthier and happier, and Mr Tesco is hardly going to starve without you!! I hope that this gives you some food for thought, Vikki\* Tesco is a vast supermarket chain in the UK.

## About the Author

Develop a workout and fitness plan that works best with your schedule.