

**fastPaleo**  
*share the hunger*

# Primal Deliverance

How Paleo Saved My Life  
from Addiction

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## What This Book Is

This book is my story of beating addiction, of nearly losing a life, and then of finding a much more wonderful one. An important part of that, and what makes it a story about you as well, is how the paleo lifestyle was such an important part of that. In that way, I wish it to be inspirational and motivational. I want you to read about the things that I went through. I want you to understand from that, that even when things are as dark and as bleak as possible, or you find yourself lost and hopeless, that there is a happier alternative, and one that is completely in your power to choose and to live.

There are many wonderful books on the science of paleo, on body chemistry, hormonal response, nutrition, and the effects of exercise. This book is not one of them. It is my way of helping you find that spark of inspiration, of motivation, of drive that is as important, if not more important, to truly being successful and happy through the paleo lifestyle.

A good part of the book is thus about me. I go into a bit of graphic detail on hard drug addiction and alcoholism. Then you will see me find the polar opposite, a life of supreme physical, mental and emotional health, all through very simple realizations and habits. I will connect it to you by describing this process exactly, giving you a roadmap of the mental process I have had so much success with in building my paleo lifestyle—more than just a list of what to eat and how to move.

My hope is that *Primal Deliverance* will form the missing mental link that so many people need in making paleo work for them—the link that motivates and drives their hearts to do the things their mind already knows will make them happy. I also hope to reach out to those struggling with addiction as someone who has plunged to the depths of the abyss and resurfaced. I hope what has worked for me might be your lifeline too.

## How This Book Will Help You

This book is for those who need motivation for the paleo lifestyle. It is part of my mission to provide people with the tools they need to be successful and healthy with paleo. From almost the start of my journey with paleo, I have wanted to help people.

My first attempt at this was FastPaleo.com. I saw lots and lots of people working with paleo theory, and while this is certainly important work, I also felt that people needed help with where the rubber met the road, so to speak. One large part of this is what foods they should eat. I wanted to provide an answer to the simple question of “Just tell me what to eat!” I also wanted to make it free and accessible, open to sharing, and uncomplicated—fast, easy and straightforward. I am happy with where FastPaleo.com has gotten in a little more than a year since its launch as I am writing this book. It has become a solid resource which paleo people both contribute to and appreciate.

Both in interacting with the friends of FastPaleo.com and friends and members of the International Paleo Movement Group Facebook page, run by the great Tim Swart and Karen Pendergrass, I began to see something else that people needed.

The answers to the theoretical questions were all there. If you needed to know what ratio of what fats to eat, or how many people thought quinoa was paleo, or whether you would benefit from tracking macro-nutrients, or how many people’s acne had cleared up since going paleo, or how to make homemade paleo toothpaste, there were answers for you, usually well-informed, usually quite complete and objective. In other words, quality scientific and practical information is readily available to anyone with the inclination to go after it.

What there seemed to be fewer answers for was the mindset and motivation necessary to make the paleo lifestyle work. A lot of times, the answer seemed to be "It works, just do it!" which wasn't enough of an answer for many.

This book, as well as the blogs and seminars included in PaleoPositivity.com, are dedicated solely to paleo mindset and motivation, the mental tools necessary make the lifestyle work for you, after you understand how paleo works, what to eat, how to work out, and how to rest.

How do you develop the conviction required to really make the wholesale lifestyle changes that going paleo entails? How do you identify, manage, and even begin to see your personal shortcomings as a positive part of your individuality? How do you find and nurture life passions that create balance and fulfillment, part of a complete paleo lifestyle? What are the necessary habits for a successful, happy paleo lifestyle and how do you build and maintain them? How do you cope with social and peer pressure, and even transform it into opportunity? What is the best way to help others learn about paleo, whether they are interested or resistant? How do you make paleo work in a family environment? How do come to terms with and manage your psychological relationship with food, including food addictions, treating and cheating?

All of these questions revolve around mentality, and cultivating a mentality that lets you both manage and even enjoy all of these challenges, in other words, motivation. People can certainly help you and steer you in the right direction, but nobody can *make* you be healthy, be paleo. It has to come from you.

But, there are things you can do that will make it come from you, and that is what this book and PaleoPositivity.com is about, helping you build the tools so that you can do it yourself, and be happy doing so.

Part of how I hope it will help you is by allowing you to read my story. Paleo has helped me escape from near-death hard drug use, alcoholism, a two-pack a day cigarette habit, being 40

pounds overweight, and more than anything, a life of unfulfilled potential. It has very literally saved my life, and I have thought in detail about how. I hope that my story will help you to see the real power of this lifestyle, as well as a real-life example of how exactly to make it work, even while overcoming pretty dire physical and emotional straits.



**Pre-paleo me**

## **The “Paleo Lifestyle” in 100 Words**

The “paleo lifestyle” is the best way to live to be healthy and happy. One of the most important parts of this is food. Foods that are nutritious in their natural state are paleo foods, and make up the paleo diet, together with proper hydration. The second part is exercise. This is simply finding a way to move your body that you enjoy, and doing it regularly. The last part is rest and relaxation. This involves getting a full night’s sleep every night, having unscheduled time for relaxation, and having time to engage in activities for pure enjoyment, to play.



## My Paleo Journey

When I got back from Japan, having escaped from my alcohol and nicotine addictions and near-death experience with cocaine, I knew right away there needed to be something to fill the void. That thing at first was the YMCA. After about a week's worth of just eating healthy meals and relaxing, I got a Y membership with my brother and started going almost every day.

I remember that first workout back like it was yesterday. Aside from the cocaine-fueled walks to nowhere around the late-night and break-of-dawn streets of Tokyo, I hadn't had any real exercise since I started doing cocaine and stopped doing karate some six plus months year before.

I think I messed around with some machines and then spent probably no more than ten minutes hitting the heavy bag they had in the downstairs by the racquetball courts. When I was done I had that head-pounding, lung-wheezing, blood-pounding feeling that only comes from going hard after being horrifically out of shape. And it was fantastic. I felt what it felt like to feel *naturally* good again, and it felt great.

The Y became a mainstay of my return to sobriety. It was interesting because I had some of my oldest memories of fitness there. I remember spending hours on end practicing soccer in the racquetball courts, lifting weights for the first time there, and even playing in some pickup basketball games some twelve years earlier back in high school.

So the Y was hugely positive. And then I had one moment when I started to realize that, while hugely important, exercise wouldn't be the only factor if I really wanted to look and feel great. I'll fully admit—vanity was indeed a motivator. I had let myself go pretty far physically by the time I had burned out, and I hadn't been in a real relationship in more than two years. I wanted to look better and go out on dates. I think it's safe to say that this is a natural feeling everyone has.

The moment was in the Walmart parking lot, when my brother and I were buying cheap household stuff to move into a place near my parents in Wilmington, Delaware. I was eating an Arby's roast beef sandwich and drinking a Cherry Coke, and it simply dawned on me that there had to be something, if not a lot, to my diet. Knowing what I know now, it is nearly unbelievable that this would seem so novel and so not a matter of common sense, but, at the time, it wasn't for whatever reason, so simple.

So I began to try to figure out what to eat. I would read the nutrition articles in Men's Health and buy books on nutrition. I remember fondly stopping by the Barnes & Noble in Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia after Chinese conversation class and getting books on nutrition and weight lifting, which was a lot of what I was doing at the Y to stay fit at the time.

I tried lots of things. I realized pretty early on I shouldn't eat junk, so that Arby's was the last fast food I had, and I made an effort to eliminate all junk food and candy from my diet. This part seemed simple enough. But the rest of it didn't, and looking back, I understand exactly why.

It was because the information was so piecemeal. There was no grounding theory. This is something Robb Wolf talks about with great clarity and conviction in *The Paleo Solution*, the fact that human nutrition, like anything else, must have a theoretical framework.

You read health magazines, and what you get is bits and pieces, bits and pieces that don't always, if ever match up: "Eat lots of small meals a day," "Eat only when you're hungry," "Eat before you're hungry to keep your body from going into starvation mode," "Breakfast is the most important meal of the day," "Have cake for breakfast if you have to (this was an actual news article)," "Watch out for fat," "Certain fats are actually good for you," "Have some sugar in the morning to 'jump start' your metabolism and keep your body from cannibalizing itself," "Eat this, not that..."

You get it, you probably have gone through a similar period of casting about in the darkness of the confusing pop nutrition media and being left not really knowing what to do. I tried different stuff, not for any real reason, but just to try stuff and try to find what worked: vegetarianism—felt terribly weak and sad. I remember trying it for a few weeks and then devouring two pounds of beef jerky in around two minutes. I tried low-fat: I felt also weak and sad and lost almost all my sex drive, it was truly awful. So I ended up eating mostly real food, but left some things in that I know now are clearly bad for me: namely, wheat and processed sugar.

The “healthy heart whole grains” message is ingrained and difficult to shake, and noodles were something I enjoyed. I also didn’t naturally come to the conclusion that processed sugar was exactly that, highly processed and bad for the body. To me at the time, it was a *normal food*—I fell into the “raw sugar” marketing trap and would have that in my coffee each morning, an obvious and huge insulin mistake as I now know, essentially elevating my insulin at the start of the day and predisposing my body to store energy as fat for the rest of the day.

But, on the whole, I was still *much* healthier than I was before. I wasn’t drinking, smoking, or doing cocaine, nor was I eating pure junk food. I got to around 185 (at 5’7”) and probably around 20-25% body fat. But for the effort that I was legitimately putting in, going to the gym and doing solid workouts and trying my best to eat what was closest to my idea of what was good for me, these just weren’t the results I was after. I wanted to be lean, wanted to be sexy, wanted a six pack, and I wasn’t getting it.

Combined with my desire for a better body, a little more than a year after getting back from Japan and going to the Y and lifting weights, I began to want something else more—more competitive, more intense, something cool. MMA was very popular at the time, and that seemed to fit the bill: it seemed cool and edgy, it certainly seemed competitive, and I wanted to feel tough.

I joined a gym in Philly, around a 45 minute drive from my home in Wilmington, Delaware. At first I did the typical MMA regimen: Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, Muay Thai, wrestling, boxing and weight training. I found out two things: the first was that I felt like, doing all of those things, I wasn't going to get significantly better at any of them, and the second was that I really, really, really loved Muay Thai (Thai kickboxing). I'll talk about Muay Thai in detail in the Develop Your Passions chapter.



**Emma to the left, holding pads**

One thing about Muay Thai is that it attracts very driven, passionate, and often very intelligent people. One of my training partners was a girl named Emma, who was a doctoral student in paleontology at the University of Pennsylvania. Obviously that is the real deal, and Emma is also very intense and driven, another one of her good qualities being that she never kid anyone. If

she told you something, it was always because she believed it. This was why when she suggested paleo to me, I listened.

Emma was in fantastic shape, and also always fantastically energetic and positive. This combined with the fact that *she was an actual paleontologist* convinced me to give paleo a try. I suppose, in retrospect, the messenger really was important.

People are much more convincing if they embody the thing they are trying to convince you of. That is why I still have a tough time listening to anyone talk about fitness who isn't in fantastic shape, or anyone talk about nutrition who doesn't eat super clean. If it is so good, why aren't you doing it and why isn't it working for you? Example is the strongest message.

I remember a Facebook post to Emma on my first day of paleo: "I'm giving up the one tablespoon of raw sugar I put in my coffee each morning. I hope this works." I think her response was something like, "Good." She also sent me lots of articles to read. And when I did, it was like this powerfully relieving epiphany of clarity.

Everything made sense, as a system. I am educated and try to be as open-minded as possible, and when I opened my mind to paleo theory, it just spoke for itself. It is evolutionary and biological fact. Human beings have eaten certain things for 99% of their history. When you eat sugar, this is what happens to your blood sugar and this is why you get fat as a result. Grains and legumes have things in them to keep animals from eating to ensure their procreation. Everything crystal clear, systematic, easy-to-understand in its essentials. That was how I found paleo.

So the next step was to implement. One thing I had realized and accepted about fitness and nutrition pretty early on in this discovery process was that self-experimentation is the most powerful determinant of what works. If you do it, and it works, then it works. If you did it and it doesn't, then it doesn't. I didn't need anything more than my own body and the information to experiment.

The three main things I had to get rid of when I started paleo were processed sugar, grains, particularly wheat and rice, and dairy. The only real tough part about the sugar part for me was the sugar in my morning iced coffee.

I really enjoyed iced coffee as I woke up to do my morning work each day, and had gotten used to the sweetness. I made the switch to raw stevia. It wasn't the same as sugar, but it was still sweet coffee, and I really wanted to give the changes a shot to see if they were finally the answer I was looking for. Now I enjoy, no love, my iced coffee black and can't imagine how I ruined it by masking the flavor with sweetness before. But, there was a bit of a transition period to get there.

I think I realized that I might have had a dairy addiction as well. They talk about dairy and wheat acting on the opioid receptors in the brain, and for me at least, this had seemed to be the

case. I used to get a pound of hard cheese and eat the whole thing at a time, or drink a half gallon of milk in a day.

I feel like I went through something like a dairy “detox.” My body kind of wanted it, but, at the same time, I could tell it didn’t *need* it. What I did notice was that my body, for lack of a better descriptor, seemed to “dry out” from the removal of dairy. Not in a bad way, but my sinuses were clearer and I had less phlegm and mucus.

I think it is important to note here that dairy is very individual, and I don’t want to scare people away from it from my personal experience. Some people do great with quality dairy, some don’t. The best thing to do is again self-experimentation: remove it, then reintroduce it. If you feel good, keep it, if not, don’t.

I found myself not really missing grains all that much. I’ve always liked fruit, so I had berries and kiwis and citrus, which seemed to perfectly satisfy whatever cravings I had for anything sweet or carby.

Looking back, I have to say that I must have already been in a place where I was close enough to the body and fitness I wanted that the drive to get there outweighed any food cravings I might have had. I can also say that I didn’t struggle with any serious ones. I didn’t *have* to have cake or chocolate candy or noodles. I had around 15 pounds of fat to lose to really get where I wanted to be, and my eyes were on the prize.

I remember there being a full three-week adjustment period to paleo for me. My body was getting used to it, and I could feel it. I didn’t feel bad, but my energy level dropped off slightly and, again, there was that feeling of “drying out” from the removal of the dairy.

Any time you make changes to a system, they are uncomfortable, even when they are positive. I think it was almost good I had successfully quit drinking, smoking, and doing cocaine before I had

made the transition to paleo. I was used to a bit of discomfort that would end up being a good thing for my body.

And it was. More than good, in fact, amazing. Those final 15 pounds just dropped off, with no real changes to my training schedule. And training became so much better. Not only did I not feel any loss in energy from the removal of sugar and grains, I felt an increase. I was stronger, lighter, and had more consistent energy levels.

My mood and general energy levels also became more even. I wasn't spiking and crashing my blood sugar anymore, so I felt better more consistently. The more even moods made me a lot better at dealing with people. I was more patient and empathetic.

And, again, I will be completely honest, finally dropping those last 15 pounds and for the first time ever having a truly lean body and set of abs gave me a new-found confidence like no other. It



**Me and my girlfriend, Melissa**

was like I had unlocked this more attractive, more confident version of myself I never knew I had. This was a tremendously empowering feeling.

It took me 32 years to finally find someone that I truly loved, but being in shape certainly opens doors. This might sound somewhat vain, but to pass through the full spectrum of being woefully out of shape and not having been on a date for two years, to decently in shape but still lumped into the "average" group, to being found physically attractive felt both fun and gave me a newfound confidence.

I spent almost an entire year just enjoying life as my new paleo self. Everything felt so much more alive and real in such great health. I had so much more confidence in every aspect of life. It felt great and I enjoyed it. I had both the confidence and the energy to challenge new things.

I finished my first book, which I had been writing for at least two years before that. I just

decided I had to finish and publish it, so I did. I

continued to train hard at Muay Thai four or five

days a week. I had a fitter, healthier, faster-

healing and leaner body for it, which really helped training.

And it brought back some old passions too.

One of the most fantastic things about paleo is

that you can eat so much really great food

compared to "die-its," which I'll talk about later,

and since I had always had a passion for cooking,

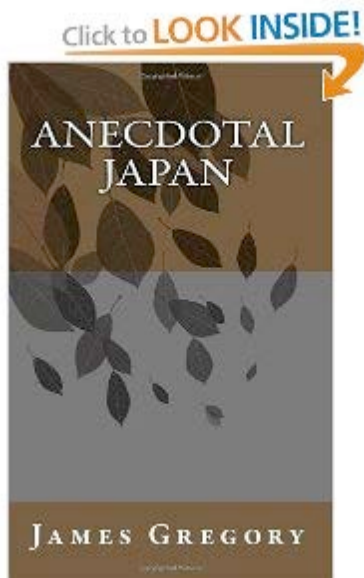
the two really went well together. I would often

post pictures of my food on Facebook. People

would like it, and some people would ask when I was doing a cookbook.

There was a distinct moment in the kitchen when the idea for FastPaleo.com came to me. I was taking a picture of a paleo dinner to post on Facebook, and something told me that there was more to this that I needed to share with the world. That was when I first came up with the simple idea of a website where anyone could share their own paleo recipes.

There was another past experience that motivated this, and brings up what was an important lesson for me about learning from experience. Around a year before starting work on FastPaleo, I had tried out a blog idea that combined two of my other interests, Japanese translation and martial



**My first book, *Anecdotal Japan*, about my seven years in Japan**



arts. The blog, (still online at <http://osssu.blogspot.com/>) simply translated Japanese martial arts media into English, for interested fight fans.

It wasn't a bad idea, but it was impractical. One thing I already knew was that translation was very labor-intensive—everything was done by hand, by me. Another thing I learned was that putting out blog content every day is tough, particularly with the added effort of translation, which in itself is tough. You just don't feel like blogging every day. It's natural. But the internet demands fresh content. I realized that, if I were to do another content website, it would be helpful to have other people submit content as well, to make it sustainable.

In this way, I really learned from my past experience with Osssu.com and applied it effectively to FastPaleo.com. While Osssu.com didn't work out in itself, it did contribute to the success of FastPaleo.com through the lesson it taught me. "There are no mistakes, only lessons."

So I believed in my idea, and got FastPaleo.com up and running. In addition to the fact that friends of the site would also be sharing recipes, the fact that I also, really, really liked paleo and liked recipes, and the fact that sharing them and running the day-to-day operation of FastPaleo.com wasn't quite as tough as the martial arts translation (which I was doing on top of the translation I was actually getting paid for to pay my bills) all made it a lot more manageable.

The words of Confucius "Find something you love and you'll never work a day in your life" really rang true for me. Working for free, every day, for a very long time, while spending your own money, which you also have to work for, and don't have a lot of, is a requirement for many new, small businesses. Looking back, I would say this would have been *impossible* had I not loved paleo recipes. I was also fortunate in that the idea worked: people enjoyed sharing recipes and the site quickly became a good, free resource for the community. The fact that the idea was working was also validating and encouraging.

There were certainly times when I broke the paleo tenets of a full night's sleep and rest and relaxation in the early days of FastPaleo. This is a tricky part of starting businesses. It's as simple as the fact that it's hard to find time to work for free on the new business and pay the bills. There were definitely times that between the site, my job, and fighting Muay Thai, I got stressed out.

I think the important thing was I was self-observant enough to catch myself. Nothing matters and you're not going to get anything done if you burn out—it's as simple as that. From there came the realization for me of the true importance of priorities. What are the *most* important things? What *needs* to be done? What details *can and should* wait until they become truly relevant? Am I doing *only* the things that produce the result? Am I concentrating on those things, and then finishing when I am done them to relax and recharge to do them again, avoiding busywork at all costs?

I had to be intensely self-aware, honest with myself, and prioritized to be both effective and *healthy*. Because if I hadn't been, I would have been a hypocrite. You can't run a website based on health by running your own health down. It's fake.

This is all part of paleo, and in this way, paleo really helped me grow as a person. I had the courage and health to challenge new things. I knew what I needed to do to maintain that health in terms nutrition, exercise and rest. And I knew both my own limitations and passions.



**Me and my girlfriend in a photo shoot for Vogue Italy**

I've been paleo for going on three years now. Around once every week I'll have chicken wings from a local wings place that probably aren't fried in the best oil and probably aren't covered with the best sauce. I eat a bit of 85% chocolate a few (or more) times a week. When I go out to restaurants, I don't worry about the fact that there's probably a bit of sugar in the sauces. I'll do paleoized treats on occasion when I make coconut cream ice cream or my brother or girlfriend or aleo gym buddies make them.

But that's about as far off the paleo path as I'll go. I haven't intentionally had anything with gluten since going paleo. Zero times. It scares me, both from what I know about just how bad it is for the body and from the horror stories I hear from paleo peeps that try it for the first time in a while as a cheat and get violently ill. Also, I realize having eaten paleo treats, wheat flour just isn't that great.

Obviously no soda or sugar-sweetened drinks. It's really not a struggle. The overwhelming happiness I feel from the fitness and emotional health as well as all of what I define as success in life—challenging new things, freedom in work, having a strong relationship with my girlfriend, satisfying hobbies, never going to the doctor except for Muay Thai injuries that usually result in cool scars and stories. All of this, and all I have to do is just not eat food that makes my body feel like crap? Who does that not sound like a good deal to?

## Lesson 1 Hit Bottom

Bobby was nice for a cocaine dealer. Although he was scarily enormous, he had a soft voice, always said hello and goodbye very pleasantly and bought me drinks after I did giant lines in the bathroom in one of the bars he paid off to allow him to do business there.

Always wanting to see the good in people, I would like to think at least part of this kindness was part of who he actually was, but I am sure most of it was because I was buying \$1,000 of cocaine from him a night.

That's a lot. So much in fact that I'm lucky I'm alive and writing this. I would get several gram bags from him at a time, usually after having eight or ten drinks, and sit in a public park in Tokyo and get high—beautiful landscaped parks with characteristic Japanese cleanliness, clean bathrooms to get high in, and the relative comfort of the Japanese tendency to leave strangers, and particularly foreigners, alone. I would sit on a park bench, take pinches of cocaine out of tiny yellow plastic baggies with my apartment key, and get high.

And it is an amazing, amazing high. To paraphrase *Trainspotting*, that is, after all, the reason addicts do it in the first place. Take the happiest feelings in life. The satisfaction of passing a test, the hug of a loved one, being recognized at work, winning at a sport—and multiply that exponentially, and let it remain for not just a fleeting second or minute, but hours on end. That's the feeling of cocaine, and that's why people do it, and that's why people with obsessive, addictive personalities, like me, have a hard time stopping once they start.

The comedown is the exact hellish opposite. The saddest sadness, the deepest loneliness, and the craziest paranoia. After one strange-feeling bag of coke from Bobby, I had a full-on paranoid delusion like nothing I had ever experienced. Often times while coming down from cocaine, you

think any sound you hear is coming from a person. This was much worse. I didn't just think I heard people, I thought someone was chasing me. It began in the cab ride back from Roppongi—a center of Tokyo nightlife, the location of my office building, and the place where drugs were to be had in the city—back to my apartment.

I thought someone was following me in the car behind the cab. Then I saw a light over a building which I thought was a spotlight from a helicopter following the car to come and get me. I ran into my apartment after getting out of the cab, and I thought I saw flashlights from the apartment across the street from what I imagined to be a team of police coming to arrest me.

It was at this point I think I really gave up. In fact I even began screaming "I give up, I give up! Come and get me!" to the hallucinatory policemen. And that was the last time I ever drank or did cocaine—January 25, 2008.

The thing is, that was the second time I never thought I would do cocaine again. I blew nearly all of my sophomore year of college through an addiction to drinking, smoking, adderall, ritalin and cocaine. After being clean and sober for more than a year, I was back on track in college studying what I knew I was good at, foreign languages, and working as a line cook in one of the best restaurants in the country. I had traded the devils of addiction for the angels of passion, and unlocked a beautiful world, for the time at least.

But there was a problem. I realized and vowed never to do cocaine or any other drugs ever again. I knew they could destroy me and take my life away. But I failed to make the same realization about drinking alcohol. One night, walking home from a shift in the kitchen at the famed French restaurant Le Bec-Fin to 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station in Philadelphia to take the train home to Wilmington, Delaware, I stopped at a bar to have my first drink in more than two years, and even now I clearly remember the justification I made to myself like it was yesterday—"I'll have a couple drinks and relax."

And I did—particularly strange drinks too, Jack and ginger ale with maraschino cherries. I remember the relaxed, happy feeling of being drunk that is all too dangerous for an addict, and had several more. While I had not smoked either for these two years, the desire for tobacco was overwhelming, and I went to the Sunoco across the street to buy a tin of Skoal, the entirety of which I dipped before getting on the train. I don't have to explain to you the absolute filth that is dipping tobacco—the leftover leaves from the processing of cigarettes cleaned up off the factory floor to be minced into a chemically flavored lip-eating micro-mince, yet at the time I felt I couldn't help myself.

And that began my eight years of "functional" alcoholism. I could stay in the bar for hours on end, and often did. I drank everything, lots of beer, but also scotch (Macallan 12 mostly), bourbon (Maker's Mark mostly) and a splash of mixed drinks (gin and tonics mostly). Then the next day it was always a battle between the hangover and whatever I was doing, which was usually hard.

Cooking in a restaurant kitchen hung-over, while unfortunately the norm for a good amount of cooks and chefs due to the stress of the job and proclivity of creative types to overindulge in substances, sucks. It's hot as hell and you're sweating to begin with, so now you're pumping sweat into an uncomfortable polyester-blend chef's coat. People are screaming at you, everything is happening extremely, extremely fast, and there is already an enormous amount of mental pressure to do even the most minute of tasks with zero error, without the added pressure of the reverberation of the devil's rhythm section pounding in your head.

So, so many days I just wanted to swallow four aspirin with cold juice and lie down in the air conditioning. For a twelve-hour shift, this was all I could think of. The mental and physical fight to be done with the hangover has completely replaced all sense of the present moment. You are acting out of compulsion and not out of joy in your task.

Perhaps out of this frustration, but why exactly I really do not know, I decided I wanted to go study abroad in Japan that summer. I was working toward a “Three Foreign Language” major at school while working at the restaurant, and Japanese was the third, “hobby” language I took after Spanish and French, because I wanted something different. I enrolled for a six-week summer course at International Christian University, a liberal arts college in Tokyo founded after the war with one of the best Japanese language programs for foreign students.

I became hooked on Japan. First the language. It is beastly difficult, particularly starting as a young adult, but I loved that. Everything is different. The writing system, with thousands of Chinese characters, takes years to learn; sentences are arranged differently; the biggest point in communication is how to be polite. I liked the challenge, and there was egoism too. There aren’t lots of white people who can speak Japanese, and I wanted to be one of them.

Also, Tokyo is incredible. Being raised in the comfortable yet unremarkable city of Wilmington, Delaware, the world’s largest city was amazingly exciting to me for many reasons: real culture and history, the multitude of beautiful neighborhoods and their wealth of shops, restaurants and parks all easily accessible by the world’s best public transportation system.

So I quit cooking. I remember distinctly the rationale I made: “You aren’t going to change the world with food”—bitingly ironic now as I feel FastPaleo.com, a food site, is probably my best positive contribution to the world, with more than one million followers. I finished around two years of college credits in a year, got accepted to the graduate school at International Christian University, and decided I was going to master Japanese, become a US diplomat, and try to do some good in the world. But I took the drinking with me. It was like a daily fight between the good and bad me.

For all of the nearly seven years I spent in Japan, I slipped by barely winning this fight. While I was in graduate school, I spent nearly every night in the bar near school, drinking to no end, talking with Japanese people, and waking up hung over the next mid-morning in time for class or to sit in

the graduate student study room and read nothing but Japanese or to go and tutor young children, old, sleazy Japanese women, and Japanese government officials in how to speak English. And I made it work.

Not that it was healthy—I was destroying myself slowly with that combined with the forty some cigarettes I smoked every day, but somehow I was driven enough by my love of Japanese to keep pushing against myself. I took graduate level classes in Japanese, read and wrote papers in Japanese, and decided to write my graduate thesis in Japanese. All of this I did. The last one in particular was an amazing challenge.

I was interested in how Japan would protect itself militarily against North Korea, which was test firing missiles over Japan around the time I needed to choose a thesis topic, so it was also topical. I read books and newspaper articles and academic papers about missile defense and wrote 120 pages in Japanese of analysis of Japan's decision to implement it. I was proud of this, but know that I look back on this part of my life with as much regret as sense of accomplishment. I was in a way saved by the fact that I was good at what I was doing, and can only imagine how much better I would have been had I been sober.

My written Japanese wasn't completely native, but it was super close. They say it takes ten years to be able to read a Japanese newspaper. I was doing it in around three years of active study—still a lot of work!—and writing a graduate thesis on missile defense in five. These skills are also what saved me when I would eventually lose my tenuous control over my life and watch it fall to pieces in front of me, like so many beautiful pink petals from the fallen cherry blossoms of a could-have-been beautiful life, they were all I had left.

But I did it. I remember it vividly. The most beautifully imaginable spring day in mid-May, May 17, 2004 to be exact, I walked hung over to the school stationary store to buy a binding and borrow a paste stick to adhere the cover with the title *Nihon no misairu bōei ket'tei no kōsatsu* (A



Consideration of Japan's Decision for Missile Defense) and onto my thesis and submit it. I successfully defended it before the review committee and graduated with a GPA of 3.8.



**My master's thesis. I still have the copy**

Looking back, being a graduate student on academic scholarship is perhaps the best life pursuit imaginable for an alcoholic. I took a fair amount of credits, but they were mostly in the afternoon, so I could pretty much stumble out of my tiny apartment—think Bruce Willis's place in *The Fifth Element*, but even a bit smaller and less fancy—take the short ten-minute ride to the campus, sit in the quiet graduate student study room, and spend the day in a combination of napping and studying Japanese.

There were so, so many days I regretted drinking as much as I had the night before—so, so many days I knew I could be so, so much better at everything if I weren't paralyzingly hung over. But somehow, I was still good enough.

The fact that I was good at Japanese continued to postpone my having confront my alcoholism. I enrolled in the PHD program at the same school, in truth, to give myself time to find a job. To stay in Japan, you need a visa. The problem is it is much easier to get one as a student than as a worker.

Japan loves to open itself up to anyone who wants to learn about its culture, be they a tourist or university student—I believe there is even a specific category of visa just for cultural studies. Or you can be a chef (the Japanese love their food), or an athlete (and their baseball). But being a foreigner employed full-time at a company that can sponsor a working visa is still difficult and rare. If you are not a management-level expat transplanted from overseas to help run a business in

Japan, as a young person you basically have to have a pretty compelling skill set, good luck, or some combination of both to secure the elusive Japanese work visa.

I eventually got it, but not at all at a place I would have expected. I started off by doing exactly what I had set out to do. I won an internship to the press room of the US Embassy in Japan. This was a big deal, and I felt like I had earned it. I had an undergraduate degree with a focus in Japanese, an MA from a Japanese school, the highest level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test. I was much more qualified and capable than the other interns, and I hit the ground running.

In my evaluation letter following my internship, I was given mostly good marks, with the caveat that I needed to not rely on my old skills including translation so much and be more focused on assisting with projects piling up on the desk of my boss. Except my old skills, translation skills, weren't old. I had learned them there during my six week internship, which had been extended to three months because I was doing so much to help with translating media and helping write press releases.

This was serious stuff too. Media reports that would be read by anyone in the State Department who wanted to know about Japan. I remember distinctly doing a magazine piece about a sort of quasi-nationalism emerging among Japan's young people that somebody at the Japan desk in the US took the time to say thank you for. Press releases issued by the embassy stating official policy. A press release on a US Marine Corps Helicopter Crash in Okinawa. A press release on the discovery of a Korean War deserter who had fled to North Korea, married a Japanese woman, and was brought back to Japan (timed intentionally on US election day to miss media attention) and sent to Sado, a Japanese island where criminals were historically exiled. Media invitations to events that would be covered on national television—I remember seeing my arm holding a microphone during an interview over new security measures by the visa-issuing part of the embassy. I taped and transcribed an official statement by Condoleezza Rice.

All of this was important stuff. At the end of the three months the head of the press office even wrote a letter to the personnel office of the embassy officially asking to hire me. I felt like all of this was the culmination of a lot of hard work at something I also happened to be good at and liked.

But they couldn't hire me. For anyone to be hired as a foreign service officer, they must pass the Foreign Service Exam. The Foreign Service Exam is an encyclopedic test of diplomacy, foreign relations, US and world history, culture, economics, financial policymaking, and an essay, so broad-ranging it is difficult to study for.



**The US Embassy in Tokyo**

It is also very difficult for the State Department to hire and keep officers in a single country. They want strong generalists they can rotate throughout the world, a deliberate policy at the time to prevent feelings of allegiance to a given country. This is also part of the reason my translation was so valued. The other people doing it were all Japanese nationals, which they could hire for prolonged periods. This in itself goes against one of the prime directives of translation, that people should translate into their native language. So both having the requisite skills and having demonstrated them to actually do a job that was required, for three months, for free, was not more important than the fact that I hadn't won the glorified game of Trivial Pursuit that was the Foreign Service exam in hiring me for the very job I had proven I could do. If it sound like I am frustrated and making fun of how the US foreign service works, it's because I am, because I was hurt by this at the time.

There are a select number of very distinct moments I can look back on in my life with the sharp feeling that they were somehow fateful, or deterministic, or clear turning points. I can still see the picture, smell the air, and feel the dejection now, all crystal clear. I remember being around halfway home on the thirty-minute bike ride that represented a third of half of my daily commute to my

unpaid internship. I rounded the corner past the bar I spent most of my nights, passing the convenience store where I would sometimes stop to get snacks or a drink, and began to slow down in the bike lane as I passed the bus stop. It was just before the campus of my school began. I wasn't that old, only 24, but I felt like for all of my life I had not quite fit into whatever I was doing, like none of the things were quite me. Then I had found a place where a rare ability I had found and cultivated was both useful and appreciated, and where I fit in. And then I was kicked out, and it made me very sad.

Then you look back and wonder if it was for a reason. What if I had burned out on coke after having been hired at the embassy, and they found out, and I got into real trouble. One time I accidentally left cocaine in my bag when I went to the company. What if I had been hired by the embassy and done the same thing, where there were Marines guarding the entrance. Maybe there was something watching over me, guiding me, knowing what was best for me even while things felt so unfair?

Or was it all just happenstance. I mean, the rules were the rules; I could have just as easily known I needed to pass the exam to be hired had I looked into it ahead of time. Maybe if I had been hired I would have eventually stopped the drinking that eventually dropped me into the temptation and bending to that temptation that would have me do coke and then nearly kill myself with it. Or maybe not. Maybe things would have happened just as they did, so I could be healthy and happy and writing these words for you. And in the end, looking back, isn't there only ever one course of events, one simultaneously connected yet disparate chain of beauty and despair that each one of us moves through.

I remember being trapped in that room. I had trapped myself there, but I was still trapped. The floor was covered in a foot-deep layer of trash: junk food packages, Pringles cans, pizza boxes and cigarette-filled soda and beer cans, empty liquor bottles, yellow cocaine baggies. I remember how

the elderly Japanese man that worked at the convenience store likely as a post-retirement hobby was so unfailingly polite to me even as I bought pints of cheap Japanese whiskey in the early, early morning to knock myself out of the terrible cocaine come-down. I had long since stopped going to work, it had been maybe a month or so. A place I never could have imagined myself at, the marketing department of an asset management company where I worked 12 to 14-hour days doing marketing writing, translation and hocking mutual funds, the only place of employment I could find to hire me full-time and sponsor my visa, was now calling and emailing and even coming to the building to see if I was ok.

I wasn't at all ok. I had vowed to myself to never again do drugs the first time I got clean, back in college the first time I ruined my life with cocaine and the first time a had a hallucination a helicopter was chasing me and the first time I heard a voice in my head telling me "This is something you must go through." How full of it I was.

Sure, I had made it more than six years since then in Japan and only messed up a couple times when another American I knew who lived near campus came by with some cheep weed to smoke, but what, alcohol wasn't a "drug?" It was something I couldn't help doing even despite my best intentions not to, something I hated myself for and for which my soul cried out to be free from but which my will, or spirit, or whatever part of me that could shake that reptilian part of my brain free with the promise of "real" happiness couldn't seem to muster.

And had it not been for that drug of alcohol, I can't imagine I would have ever broke that promise to myself to never again do what I thought of as "real" drugs, but then it happened. I was out one night at a "standing bar," (*tachinomiya*), a place offering cheap drinks and Japanese bar food like good yakitori. The whole idea was a throwback to the immediate post-war era when people really didn't have money and were looking for cheap fun.

Vintage revivalism if you will, like what you would find in Williamsburg, Brooklyn if it were in Tokyo, but it was fun and amazingly easy to meet girls there, and when you drink ten drinks at a time, why not spend a bit less.

I remember his face with amazing clarity. He had small features, almost rodent-like, squinty eyes, and a thin build, which really reminded me, and remind me even more so in retrospect, of depictions of the devil in Renaissance oil paintings, leaping up from hell to grab at the feet of Jesus and his disciples. I was drunk, of course, and when he offered me the little red bag, unsolicited and unexpected, I did it. All of it.



**NYX, the bar I spent almost every night in during graduate school**

And then it began, that unbridled, unmatched pure joy that is the high of cocaine, the reason anyone does it at all. Rick James wasn't lying on Chappelle's Show. A great surging happiness, you want to talk to everyone, and I did. I think I ended up at a cabaret club and met a Japanese salaryman who I sat at a sushi bar with until well into the early morning, chatting about a lot and nothing at the same time.

And then I went home, and eventually crashed. I remember with equal clarity waking up the next day, well past the karate class which, had I realized it and committed to it completely instead of the alcohol, could have been my saving grace all along. I was wearing a simple green t-shirt, pair of khaki-colored cargo shorts I got cheap from Uniqlo, and began to take the trash and recycling out to tidy my always tidy apartment.

It hit me overwhelmingly in the middle of my soul, a voice telling me that I had set something in motion which I had no control of. But then again, wasn't it already set in motion that night some six years ago when I made the decision to have a couple drinks after work as a line cook in Philadelphia at the bar I still occasionally drive by to this day in my life of beautiful saved sobriety? Or maybe the devil man at the bar was really an angel, and the cocaine would force me to a place of realization where I would have to pick between death and the only alternative, the correct decision that I was weaker than the strange smelly liquid in the glass and sweet, acrid white powder in the bag.

Was I choosing? Was I being forced to choose? Or was there any choice? Wasn't it really just something I "would go through" to get me to a point where I needed to be? Or was it all a big dream of a giant space creature and me, my emotionally charged surroundings and all of the people and things that flowed in and out of them just part of the flotsam and jetsam spewed from the unconscious of this space creature as the dream helped it in some way to chemically readjust its own brain from whatever circumstances and "reality" it might have been confronting?

Whatever it was, I knew almost immediately it was irreversible. Somehow I kept it to the weekends at first, waiting all week for Friday night and getting as close as I could to the high of cocaine by binge drinking during the week, but never close enough. At first one 10,000 yen bag (around \$100) would do, and then I would come all the way home and back out on another 10,000 yen cab ride for more, and then I was buying five and six in a night, and then I messed up and did it on a weekday, and then it got so bad I would do nearly \$1,000 at a time, until well into the evening the next day, until I felt my heart was going to stop.

But my heart was already stopped in a way, and the cocaine would start it, if only temporarily, and if only to shut it back down in the most horrid way after the high wore off. My soul was crying out for some way to be happy. Maybe it was the loneliness that the rigidness of Japanese society, perhaps particularly Japanese society as an outsider, could impart. Perhaps that was only the

watershed, and what was crying out had always been crying out, for an answer to the ever-present wonder of what exactly to make of everything, of this existence.

It continued, for nearly six full weeks after the time I had stopped going to work. So many terrible, disgust-filled nights. I remember one where I had met two Venezuelan girls who were with me for some combination of money, drugs and sex, and perhaps the latter for some combination of the former—it was hard to tell. We were drinking and doing drugs in a club, when something happened and they got upset with a dreadlocked man on the dance floor. I don't remember if someone spilled a drink on someone, or if words were exchanged, all I remember was that he was so filled with anger that all he could do was stare at one of them with rage, and tears began to stream down his face. It is one of the strangest memories of my life.

Another night, I was so high that my hand wouldn't stop wavering. Another foreigner at the bar interpreted this as "gay hands" if you will, and made homophobic slurs about me all night. I ended up leaving with an amazingly tall and beautiful Philippine girl, who I couldn't have sex with because I was limp from the cocaine. There were similar nights at the Chinese massage parlors, and with other girls I had brought home. Eventually it made more sense for me to just bring the drugs home, get high and watch porn.

Somehow there was no greater happiness than to come home with three or four yellow baggies of coke. The anticipation of the high, or contentment that that great feeling was right in your hand was somehow almost as good as the actual high itself. It brings me the sharpest pain in my throat now to describe what at the time made me happier than anything: coming home, plopping the drugs down on the neat white desk, opening a can of lemon-flavored Japanese malt liquor, putting on porn, doing a huge line of coke, and simply sitting back and feeling the immense yet artificial wave of happiness rush through my body. I feel so ashamed now.



And even now, as a published author, amateur fighter, business owner, dog lover, mentor of a young boy, boyfriend of the most amazing girl ever, taxpayer, healthy living proponent, yogi, and all-things-considered, a "grownup," who somehow has worked hard to have their life together, that image of the little baggies on the table is still mentally tempting, if equally terrifying.



**Me and the pugs, relaxing**

That is both the danger and the potential empowerment of the addict's mind. I have realized I live my life on a knife edge, a hand carved matchstick that is amazingly beautiful yet pressed constantly against the striking surface of the matchbox, gorgeous, yet ephemeral, possible of burning up at the second my hand slips and strikes the match.

But it's my hand. I control it. I know that having a single drink would be the striking of that match, which would lead to me have ten more, which would lead me to take what money I have to Aramingo Avenue a half hour from my house in South Philly to buy drugs, and light the fire. One drink would lead to possible death. But at the same time, that realization empowers me not to have it, and all I ever have to do is avoid having one drink, and keep the match safely unlit.

The cocaine come-downs are some of the absolute worst memories of my life. I remember just sitting, watching porn into the early morning and even afternoon. The immense high of the cocaine is replaced by the polar opposite sadness, and intense paranoia. Every sound is the cops coming to

get you. All you want to do is go to sleep and wake up with the feeling gone, and you do, sometimes 24 hours later.

I remember it got to the point where I realized I couldn't salvage my life, and I was going to kill myself, or end up being killed by the Japanese government, a penalty I had heard was not uncommon for drug offenders in Japan. I "hit bottom" as they say. I remember looking at myself in the mirror. I was covered with a full dirty beard, filth from not having showered, and my body was pale and disgusting to look at. I could almost feel the shame and sadness looking right back at me.

And I remember breaking down and crying. I was broken, done, had given up. And I called my father. My parents had been calling and emailing and otherwise trying to get a hold of me for more than a month. My brother told me in an email that when they couldn't on Christmas, my mother had cried.

This experience permanently etched in my being the realization that family is one of the only things we really have in this life. What if I had no father to call? No father to buy me a plane ticket. No father, mother and brother that would give me a home to detox in, cook me meals, and go with me to the YMCA to reverse the damage that I had done to my body. Would I have ended up on the streets of Tokyo, robbing people for cocaine money until I was arrested and thrown in jail for something the US embassy, to which I had given so much, would want absolutely nothing to do with?

But I did have a father, and I called him, and had one of the most important talks of my life. He wasn't mad, and told me that I could come home, but only, and absolutely only if I gave up drinking for good. He told me I never would have done the coke if it wasn't for the alcohol, that I had to realize I didn't have any power over it.

People say you can't change a person, and I agree, but when a person is ready for change, sometimes the right words are the last little push they need to set them in the right direction. These were certainly those words to me.

This was absolutely the lowest point in my entire life. I had truly hit bottom. I was just barely clinging to life physically. I had already lost everything I had accomplished professionally. Emotionally, there were many times I looked at the kitchen knife and thought about how it might be an easier way out of everything.

If I were to define "hitting bottom," it would be a point of sadness so profound you will do whatever you can never to return to it. For me, this was alcoholism and cocaine addiction. Doing whatever for me meant doing something I had for a long time thought to be impossible: quitting alcohol altogether. It took me nearly ten years to make this realization, helped by my father, and put into words perhaps best in a line from Leo, the recovering alcoholic White House Chief of Staff from *The West Wing*, the entirety of which I watched soon before returning from Tokyo to my parents home in Delaware: "I don't understand people who leave half a glass of wine on the table. I don't understand people who say they've had enough. How can you have enough of a feeling like this? How can you not want to feel like this longer? My brain works differently."

The realization that you are different from other people is not an easy one, but for me it was just as necessary. My obsessive nature, turned in the right direction like Japanese or Muay Thai or cooking or writing, is my strength, but turned in the wrong direction, like substances, is equally my downfall.

But I had to get to the place in my head where I first realized, then accepted, and then really embraced the fact that I could never, ever, ever be a person who had one or two drinks. It made no sense to try to fight to be that way, because it was a fight against my very nature, and that is a

fight no one can win. So that's what it meant for me: I could never have a drink of alcohol again, because it wasn't who I was as a person, and that was ok.

One of the greatest strengths in life is accepting your own weaknesses. It takes true character to embrace your shortcomings, and when you do, you may realize that they are actually your strengths too.

Hitting bottom doesn't have to mean nearly killing yourself with drugs and alcohol. I see lots of people with profound frustration, even anger about their general health. They think they are doing everything right, but still aren't happy about their bodies or how they feel. What can be even worse about this kind of "hitting bottom" is that you may not be as aware of it as you might be with something like a near-death experience with drugs or alcohol. You've accepted that this is just how things are, that there isn't a brighter, happier alternative.



**Japanese business man me**

I think being overweight can certainly be a form of hitting bottom for many. I certainly experienced this when I was at the low point in my health. It was particularly difficult in Japan, where everyone is thin, and there is no social stigma attached to calling people fat, which I was called plenty of times. I can't explain to you just how amazingly my self-esteem increased when I became fit and healthy with paleo. I felt good about myself, and it felt good to feel that others felt I was attractive.

I think depression can be another, and one that is often derived from or linked to other forms of hitting bottom. In my experience, depression can often come from a void in life, a simple lack of positive things to fill your days with that leave you sad for meaning and purpose.

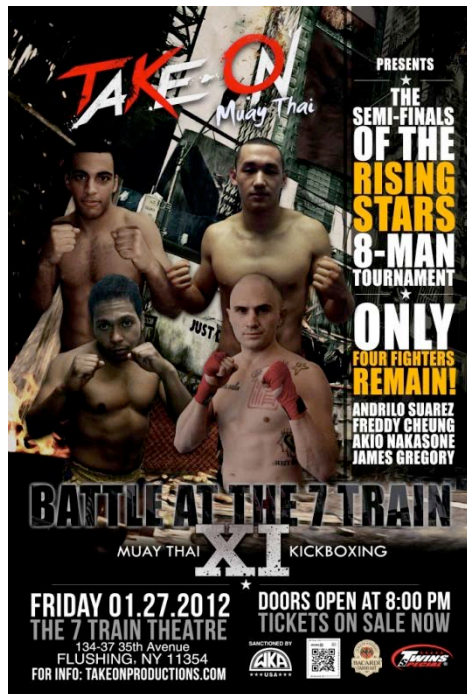
The paleo lifestyle can be a great way to fill that void in and of itself. The cooking, exercise you enjoy, the community, and also, the physical and emotional health and confidence it creates forms a foundation that allows you to begin to fill up your life with things that bring you genuine happiness.

Accepting you've hit a bottom point in your life doesn't make you weak. Or perhaps, better put, accepting your weaknesses is actually a reflection of true strength and courage. Everyone has their own weaknesses, and I believe it is those who are able to first be real with them that are able to overcome them. But before that, we must all come to terms with ourselves.

## Lesson 2 Engage Your Weaknesses

I didn't truly start to be happy in life until I embraced the things I was bad at. Since then, I have done things I never would have been able to had I continued to be trapped in a fight against myself. I've started three of my own businesses and worked for myself for almost five years; I've gotten complete control over how much I work and how much time I devote to other life pursuits I enjoy; I've written two books; I've gone from nearly killing myself with drugs and alcohol to having my face

on an advertisement for the semi-finals of a Muay Thai tournament I fought in New York City.



**Show card for the 8-man rising start tournament I fought in**

I don't say all this to brag, although putting it all down on paper certainly feels good, but rather to demonstrate what is possible when you really accept, even embrace, and create a life that accommodates your short-comings. For me, I had one big one: alcohol and drugs. Alcohol really—my father told me, and he was right, that I never would have done the cocaine in the bathroom that night in the yakitori bar had I not been drunk first. I wouldn't have. I wouldn't have even thought to do it sober. I had to accept that I was an alcoholic, and that that was actually a *good* thing.

Let me explain to you what I mean. Having an obsessive personality means you can be obsessive about things that are either positive or negative. If those things happen to be negative, in the form of obsessive drinking, we just happen to call that alcoholism. I'm still an "alcoholic" now, even after nearly five years sober. If the things happen to be

positive, like music, writing, or martial arts, or anything else “constructive,” we happen to call that “passion,” but it’s the same driving force. That’s why so many musicians, artists, writers and other creative types can so easily fall victim to substance abuse—to be really good at their craft, they *must* be obsessive.

So for me to try to for so many years to somehow convince myself that I was “strong enough” or had the “willpower” to only have a few drinks was nonsense. How can a person be strong enough to not be themselves? It doesn’t even make sense.

The entire rest of my life was all or nothing, why wouldn’t drinking be too? It seems so stupid to me looking back. I had to get to a place in my head where I accepted that the choice between drinking and not drinking for me was very black and white: drinking—at all—meant death, and not drinking—at all—meant life. I chose the latter, and every day I still try to take time to be thankful for sobriety and reaffirm that I will always be living my life as a matchstick set to strike and burn out if I have even a sip of alcohol. Some fights, I’ve realized, you win by not fighting.

And I have won. My life is beautiful now. Waking up sober used to be this miraculous, energetic rarity, and now I wake up in perfect paleo health sober and happy every day. In a way, it’s almost sweeter because I can still to this day remember the horrific feeling of waking up strung out and hung over—the deepest depression and hopelessness compared to this bright shining joy.

If you are reading this and you do struggle with substance abuse, know that accepting it as a weakness may also be the key to unlocking beautiful strengths, some you may never knew you had, but you have to be real with yourself, and recognize that that strength lies in your weakness.

Another weakness I have seen many people struggle with is a weakness to food addictions and cravings. Incredibly strangely, even though I had serious addictions to alcohol and cocaine, I haven’t had similar problems with food. I think part of the reason is that I don’t feel deprived with paleo. The majority of the foods I like are savory—I love beef and seafood and hearty salads. Sometimes I

miss noodles, but I've found alternatives, like *shirataki* yam noodles and the occasional almond flour spaghetti. Another reason is I don't really expose myself to any non-paleo foods. There are none in my house; I avoid the center aisles in the grocery store, and I just get a side salad or vegetable instead of the bread or grain when I go out to eat.

So, I think there are a couple of lessons here in terms of engaging your weaknesses with food cravings. The first is to identify what they are. If you always eat the entire chocolate bar, recognize that. If you always eat the entire bag of potato chips, recognize that. The big difference with food and drugs and alcohol is that you have to eat food, and you don't have to have drugs or alcohol.

So if you struggle with junk food cravings, first accept that and don't try to fight with it. Don't think that you will be able to have just a few squares of chocolate or a few potato chips. If you haven't the last hundred times, why would you be able to now? Not trying to be mean, but, right?

The first thing to do is a clean-out, which can be tough. I know change can be hard for lots of people, sometimes the hardest thing, but if you know what is right in your head, and aren't doing it, don't expect anything to change. The only thing that ever matters is what you've done. That bears repeating, as I think it's a good mental exercise for lots of life improvement: the only thing that ever matters is what you've done.

So first, go through your house and throw out all junk food and non-paleo foods. All of them. Yes, all of them. You might think you are being wasteful. What's more of a waste though, the \$50-100 of factory food that isn't good for your body, or the days of your life you are wasting living unhappily because you are a prisoner to bad food habits? Again, that may sound harsh, but it is the reality, and if we want happiness we have to be real with ourselves.

I know there are many who try to maintain a paleo lifestyle with unsupportive and/or SAD ("Standard American Diet") family members. If this is the case, and they are the ones wanting to keep junk food in the house, I think the first thing to do is really sit down with them and help them



understand your feelings. The fact is that people *do not need* junk food to be happy, while there are plenty of people who absolutely *do need* to eliminate it to be happy. Anyone who truly loves you should value your happiness more than eating foods that aren't good for them and are destructive for you. It's that simple. If after a discussion with them, they still refuse to get rid of the junk, then that ceases to be a problem with paleo and becomes one of whether a healthy relationship exists in the first place. If someone really loves you, they should want you to be happy.

Doing a thorough clean-out of junk food is a great first step to accepting your weakness. Environment is critical in addressing substance abuse, and I believe it's the exact same thing with food addictions. I can't have bags of cocaine and bottles of hard liquor sitting around the house just like a junk food addict can't have bags of Doritos and Snickers bars lying around. Clean-outs also help you feel better. In this way, you're engaging your weaknesses instead of being stuck in an unwinnable battle with them.

Another tool you must—and I can't stress this enough, *must*—have in beginning to engage a weakness or addiction to processed or junk foods is the ability to cook simple foods. Cooking can seem complicated, or like something you're not used to, or like too much time, but it really doesn't have to be any of those things. I would say 90% of the everyday food I cook involves simple cutting of meats, fruits and vegetables with a chef's knife, putting oil in a pan, waiting for it to get hot, and then moving the stuff around in the pan for 5-10 minutes. You really can do it.

In fact, this type of simple cooking is exactly what you *should* be doing to keep you eating the right healthy, paleo foods and not junk foods and processed foods. Simplicity is the key to consistency, and the skills required should take only a couple times cooking to get a grasp of, and then you have a tool for life.

Just try it! Get a simple recipe, and try cooking it. If it doesn't come out right the first time, no problem! Try again—a lot of cooking is experimentation.

Another fantastic part of paleo and another possible engagement strategy for those who have a tough time with treats is that there are plenty of paleo treat options. They are more healthy in many ways than regular treats, as they are gluten-free and don't contain processed sugar. But there are a couple of things to remember with paleo treats. The first is that they are still treats. Not buying or keeping junk food or other SAD treats in the house will get you most of the way to avoiding over-indulging, but if you find that if you still have a hard time not eating the entire batch of paleo chocolate chip cookies, more than once a week or so, then maybe you do need to realize that treats aren't just for you, or perhaps, more accurately, that you will be *happier without treats*.

That is really what this is all about, happiness. Health is a very large part of happiness, and addictions in general get in the way of health, and by extension happiness. If you need to make the realization, like I did with alcohol, that sweet treats is an all-or-nothing issue for you, and that there is actually profound happiness in choosing nothing, be wise enough to realize that.

Here is why the happiness of not choosing something you think you really like is greater than choosing it. I believe this is true for both alcohol and drugs just as sweets and junk food. A candy bar, or a bag of chips, just like a glass of scotch, or a line of cocaine, will indeed make you happy, remember, that's why we do them right? It tastes delicious, or feels wonderful, but only for a little bit, then what are you left with? Well for one, you are left feeling like crap. If you had a treat full of processed sugar, you likely have a headache, blood sugar crash—you feel like crap physically.

And you feel bad mentally too. You're typically depressed. Particularly if you had been eating healthy before that, you feel like you've ruined your hard work. For some, this can lead to bingeing, where you think to yourself that if you're going to be bad, you might as well go ahead and be really bad and get it out of your system. In the worst case scenario, this can then lead to purging, throwing up or even starving yourself or committing to unhealthy "cleanses" which will only leave you weak and worse off than when you started.

None of this is worth the taste of the candy bar or cookie. And, I know what you're saying, "I know, but I can't help myself." And I totally understand you, in a way that many who haven't struggled with addiction cannot. Addiction isn't a rational process. It is driven by the same part of the brain that drives things like thirst and sex drive and other things out of our conscious control.

The big and obvious difference between alcoholism and drug addiction and food addiction is that obviously nobody needs to drink or do drugs to survive, whereas clearly people must eat to survive. In this way, I have true sympathy for people with food addictions, which I believe are absolutely a real problem. But, just because you are an addict, doesn't mean you have to be addicted.

I will always be an alcoholic, meaning I have the type of personality which will always make me drink alcohol to excess if I have any at all. But there is a hugely important "but" here, that has to do with an excuse people make all too often that keeps them stuck in fights with self-destructive habits that they will never win. *Just because you're an addict, doesn't mean you have to be addicted.*

In other words, just because you struggle with a behavior, doesn't mean that behavior has to control you. So you don't say "Well, I have a food addiction so I couldn't help eating those two dozen cookies," unless that is really what you want to do. But if you don't, and you want a life free from the self-destructive ups and downs of food addictions, there are definite ways out.

The first is the clean-out that I mentioned. Create an environment free from whatever the thing is that you want to avoid. This shouldn't be hard. Get some trash bags, throw everything out that isn't paleo in your whole house. The next thing to do is to create a shopping list. There are plenty of resources, many free, to let you know what is and isn't paleo. Keep things simple. Pick a few fruits and vegetables you know you will like. Pick a few meats you know you will like. Grab some nuts and eggs if you know you'll eat them. Have a list.

Another key part of addiction breaking is establishing new, positive habits to replace old ones. I can't tell you how much this has helped me in staying sober. Shopping for and making foods that

make you strong and healthy can absolutely be one. If it is new to you, all the better, you've found a new hobby to happily fill your time with. Once you've built the positive routine, it will stick just like the addiction, believe me, but you have to give it a little time. Change is hard, *at first*, and that is why many people give up too quick, but then it gets easy, and then it gets to be a fun part of who you are. Yes, grocery shopping for healthy foods is absolutely something I look forward to.

Another way to stay on track is to only shop at places that have healthier food. Food is the foundation of your health, and as such, you should recognize it is just as important an expense as your rent or mortgage and utilities. Food should be the *last* place you try to save money. So buy the best food you can, at the best place you can.

When I go to pick up my meats from the delivery from the local farm, there is literally zero to distract me. There is the farmer and my cooler of meat, whole honey, and whatever else I have ordered, and nothing else. Getting produce from a CSA is another way to completely avoid having to look at junk food when you food shop, farmers markets and produce stores are others. Once you have gotten it out of your house, actively work to avoid exposing yourself to it when you buy your food. Again, it's all about healthy environments and healthy habits. Once you create these, things become much easier.

Another place to take active control is eating out. You may tend to think that eating out at restaurants, parties or in other social situations will force you to break paleo, or that you're being weird by not eating what everyone else is eating. This may be particularly so as we define many social events with food that is bad for us, particularly in the United States: cake for birthdays, popcorn for movies, pizza for pretty much whatever kind of get-together you can think of, bake sales selling sugary junk to raise money for something that probably isn't as important as the health problems the baked goods contribute to—the list goes on and on.

But guess what? You can just as well do any of these things without the junk. Really. I've had plenty of paleo b-day parties. BBQs are pretty much paleo to begin with. I actually enjoy the movies more when I haven't wasted \$40 on crap that is going to make me feel awful.

But you may be wondering how you will deal with the social pressure? The people telling you to "live a little," or "have a little fun." One of the saddest moments like these I can recall was at a family get-together. One relative was eating paleo, and didn't want to have some of the less-than-paleo treats being offered. Another relative, insisted, saying, "You have a good figure, try one!"

The thing to remember when people make comments like this is that they are almost always acting out of their own self-consciousness or despair. In other words, *it has nothing to do with you*. You are just as entitled to put whatever you want in your mouth as anyone else, and others' projected insecurity should in no way make you feel you can't. What is particularly strange about this dynamic is that the reverse would be unthinkable rude: it is socially acceptable for people's healthy choices to be criticized, whereas criticizing people's unhealthy choices is unthinkable.

Encouraging a healthy person to make unhealthy decisions that will hurt them is ok, whereas encouraging an unhealthy person to make decisions that will help them is rude. That is how out of whack things have gotten in our junk-food society.

So, what is the point of all this? The point is that *being weird can be right*. Just because the majority of people are making unhealthy decisions, it doesn't mean they are right. It also in no way makes you wrong for making healthy choices. So, be proud to be different. Bring a healthy paleo side dish to the next party. Lord knows there are plenty of great ones, after all, it's not like we're depriving ourselves.

Stand up for your decisions. If people ask you why you aren't having cake, tell them. If they in any way twist your statement to make it a reflection on their own bad decisions, like "What, are you trying to make me feel bad?" remember *that's their problem, not yours*. There is often success in

purposely moving against the crowd, and the paleo lifestyle is a fantastic example of this. Be paleo proud, and remember that your own health is much more important than others' insecurities.

The other thing is to surround yourself with positive, supportive people to the extent that you can. I think group exercise, like martial arts, or CrossFit, or yoga, or group classes at your gym can be a great way to do this. And if you need to distance yourself from people who actively discourage you, by all means do so. People are only your friends when they act like it, and friends want friends to be happy.

Another very common weakness people need to engage is exercise. One problem I see is that people create social barriers to exercise. In other words, they associate exercise with a group to which they feel they don't belong: jocks, athletes, gym rats, muscle heads. People who see themselves as intellectuals or refined can somehow feel that physical activity compromises this, like somehow smart people can't be fit or have muscles. If you feel this way, I would say that you basically need to realize there is no real division between mind and body.

One of the worst things you can do in life is pigeonhole yourself into a social stereotype and limit your life experience. There are any number of smart, refined, civilized people in the world who are also physically fit. Many of history's greatest cultures placed equal emphasis on the physical as well as the mental, or perhaps, better put, realized that they are one in the same. There are any number of physical activities that also require profound thought and mental discipline to excel at: dance, martial arts, weightlifting to name a few.

Realize also that health is the foundation for everything else you do. I have several extremely mentally challenging jobs and pursuits: I translate Japanese; I write books; I run websites and businesses; I mentor a young boy. I wouldn't be *nearly* as good at any of these things without a solid foundation of health, of which exercise is one cornerstone. The same is true for everyone. Your brain is a part of your body like any other part, and it will be fitter with exercise, pure and simple.

There is a pretty cool quote I very much like that summarizes this quite neatly: “The Nation that makes a great distinction between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting done by fools.”—Thucydides.

This is not to say everyone has to be a warrior to get their exercise in. I am just trying to make the point that physical activity is crucial for *anyone*. But, what if you are still thinking it’s not you, or that you don’t know what to do to be active. The first piece of advice is that there are *many* forms of exercise.

There is a kind of machismo attached to the paleo movement that has people thinking that they have to do some form of extreme exercise like heavy weight work or CrossFit or Tough Mudders. This just isn’t the case. Time and time again research shows that you get the majority of the health benefits from *moderate* exercise. That also isn’t to say that extreme exercise is bad: if you like lifting heavy or doing CrossFit, by all means go for it.

The point—and this I *strongly* believe—is “The best exercise is the one you will do.” Maybe you don’t like weights and prefer taking long walks with your dog through the park. Maybe jogging is boring or hurts your knees and you like yoga more because it’s relaxing and easy on your joints. Maybe you prefer a team sport where you get to make friends. Maybe—like me—you think splashing around in the mud and having to wear long socks because you’re scared of nicking your shins with the Olympic bar is actually for sissies and prefer a real extreme sport where you risk serious injury and even death every time you step in to the ring (Chill out Xfitters and Tough Mudders, that was the funny part!! Lol). Different strokes!

The worst thing I see people try to do is push their exercise regimen off on others as the “best” or “ideal” one. The best for you isn’t the necessarily the best for others. It’s great to share, but people have to find what they like. BUT! You still have to find *something*. How do you find something? Try stuff out! I’ve tried out tons of stuff: heavy lifting (not my thing), CrossFit (not my

thing), Pilates (not my thing), Yoga (been going a couple times a month for four years), kettlebells (couple times a week for three years), Muay Thai (several days a week for three years).

It's perfectly ok to try stuff and not like it. That's just self-discovery. And throughout this process, you find something you like and can stick to, and something that is really you. Maybe you're really lucky and find something you truly love and that changes your life. This process of trial and discovery is how we engage our perceived weakness: we do the best we can to find something that we will do, and we do that. Don't waste your time trying to live someone else's life and do someone else's exercise. Live *your* life, doing what *you* enjoy, and you'll find health and happiness.

In closing, I'd like to encourage you to find what you feel your biggest weakness is, and do your best to engage it. The biggest challenge here lies in the fact that your largest weakness may be the one you also most want to ignore. It certainly was for me. I *chose* to ignore my alcoholism for nearly ten years. I wanted to think I could beat it, live my life despite of it, and perhaps most unfortunately, allowed the cheap, easy happiness of the booze get in the way of a much larger, much realer, much more fulfilling happiness.

Be real with yourself. You know deep down what is keeping you from being the best version of you that you can be. Engage it, overcome it, and become the real you.



## Lesson 3 Develop Your Passions

I took the straight knee to the body within the first three seconds of the first round. I knew I had to be aggressive, because I started my last fight way too slow and never came back, so I went right after him and walked right into the knee.

We always learn in Muay Thai that a straight knee to the body is one of the most devastating weapons. The full force and power of the largest muscle groups and heaviest limb in the body concentrated right into the point of the knee, right into the gut. He caught me with my core loose too. I was always told straight knees would take the fight out of you, make you want to go home.

And within the first three seconds of the round, I wanted to go home. Everything that I had given up to do this, my age—32 is not exactly young for Muay Thai—my natural ability—after all, I had trained *so* hard, is this the best I can do?—all of it flashed through my mind in that first round, but I fought through it.

When you get hit with a body shot, there is an intensely paralyzing natural nervous reaction through which your body is attempting to protect its vital organs. A lot of the time, you crumple over due to this, and a lot of the time in ring fighting, you get counted out when you do. I kept going, but in those first simultaneously everlasting and fleeting 120 seconds of the first round, I certainly wanted to go home. I just didn't.

When I got back to the corner, I think the first thing I said to my trainer was "I don't think I can do this," to which he replied by slapping me in the face and yelling at me "Yes you can!"—after all, the man has "Tuff Love" tattooed right across his knuckles.

I came out hard in the second round. Jab to rear hook, push kick, rear body kick—I was throwing, I thought at least, what we had worked on for the fight. And then he caught me again, another huge straight knee, right to the gut, and this one buckled me over. He followed up with strong hands, putting me down with a long, hard cross, right down the middle.

I hit the canvas, and remember that my very first thought was “You *have* to get up.” I got up, as I remember it, almost immediately. When I got up, the standing eight count began. A standing eight count is when the referee sees the fighter is hurt or in trouble, and counts to eight while he is on his feet to decide whether he can keep fighting.

All during the ten or so seconds between the time I hit the canvas and got up and got eight counted, there was this fantastic psychological battle in my head between my *desire* to quit and my *will* to keep going. Nobody *wants* to keep fighting after getting smashed with two straight knees and put down with a monster cross. But it’s a fight, and I represent a camp and other people, and more than anything, I wasn’t going to lose the fight for something I *didn’t do*.

There’s a t-shirt pretty popular among kickboxers, black with “Fighting Solves Everything” embossed on the front in big white block letters. Of course, this is poking fun at the idea of using our words and not our fists, talking things out, walking away, and saying, “Screw that, just punch them in the face!” Obnoxious t-shirts are the best, and I wear it often to have fun.

But at the same time, there is a very resounding and likely unintentional truth in the apparently meatheadish message of the t-shirt. Muay Thai tests your entire being: it is as much physical as it is emotional and intensely intellectual. It makes other things in life comparatively easy. To do it competitively, even at an amateur level, you need self-discipline, physical and emotional awareness, a sense of life balance, and, determination.

Then, you take all of that spread out over months and years of training, and it gets condensed and magnified into a fight that, for an amateur like me, lasts literally six minutes—three years of total training becomes six weeks of training camp becomes just six minutes of actual fighting.

So I got up for the eight count, and as the ref was counting it out, sure I didn't *want* to continue. I could feel I was rocked (wobbly from getting hit in the head). But at the same time, I had developed the discipline to make myself get up when I had to. When the eight count finishes, the referee asks you to walk towards him with your gloves to your temple. I did, but my legs weren't really under me—I could feel them wobbling terribly. Then he asks you the most amazing question: "Do you want to continue?" Hell no, I didn't *want* to continue. I had the wind life knocked out of me twice with giant straight knees and got knocked down and rocked hard. But, "Yes sir!" is what I said.

At that moment, I could see the referee look over in the direction of my corner and the doctor. Then he looked back at me in the eyes. And then he waved off the fight. The next thing I remember was the sharp sting of smelling salts in my nostrils. That was the first time I had ever had them, and man, do they work. I was a little more with it after that, but not by much.

My trainer walked me under the ropes, and I told him I couldn't go back to see our campmates yet and needed a minute. At that moment, I was really sad with myself. I remember saying thing like "I don't want to waste people's time" and "I don't know if this makes sense at my age." One thing about fighting is that your memories of how the fight went and what actually happen can be hugely different. Your body turns things off during fight or flight, and memories are imperfect at best. I really didn't know how well I did.

One of the best things about my trainer, Rigel, is that he is unfailingly honest with his fighters. This, combined with the fact that he is a world champion and world-class pad holder, is the reason he produces so many competitive fighters. He had even gotten someone who started at 29 and

never been in a street fight in myself to compete. If you did bad, you'll know about it. If you did good, you'll know about it.

The first thing he did was reassure me, which he would only have done if I had done good things in my fight. This immediately made me feel better: "You were aggressive and did what we worked, you just got caught." "Think about all the people sitting at home getting pissed (Rigel is Irish) and you're out here doing this." Ok, if Kru is saying this, it couldn't have been that bad ("Kru" is teacher in Thai and what we call Rigel, because he is our Muay Thai Kru). So I went back over to where everyone was standing, "sorry guys" and bowed to everyone. People didn't seem that disappointed. Obviously it sucks to lose, but my friend and training partner Kate said too "What? You fought well."

This isn't to say there weren't things I could have done better. There always are. You can always improve. But I didn't beat myself. In going back and watching the videos, I felt better about it, and Kru and everyone else's words made sense. I fought through the first knee, was aggressive, did what we had practiced, but just got caught by another knee. Had I just not taken the knee, I probably would have won. Well, then it wouldn't be a fight now, would it?

My next fight was six weeks later, at TakeOn's Battle at Bally's II, as I stepped in on five days notice to replace my campmate, who had broken his wrist. I knew my opponent was taller and bigger than me, and that he had knocked out his man in his previous fight. I had originally wanted to be on this card, and I always train, eat right and stay in shape, so I decided to go for it. "Fighters fight" as we like to say. I actually got pretty close to if not in 100% fight shape by the time of weigh-ins. I hit pads with Kru almost every day and ran, had no problem making weight, and felt fit and strong.

In the late morning before the fight, I lay in the solitude of my bedroom, cooled by the air conditioner and darkened by the shades. My mind drifted to a similar late summer morning around

five years ago, when I lay in a similar room. The room was the same in that it was cool, dark and solitary. But the me there was very different. The me was a me that was strung out on eight balls of cocaine and bottles of whiskey, wracked equally by drug-induced paranoid delusions and deep sadness at what my life had become. I let my mind stay there for a bit, imagining the room as being that dark, cold hole that had trapped me for almost too long. Then I opened my eyes, as if relieved to awaken from a bad dream. I was safe. I was healthy and fit. I was about to get a chance to be a part of a televised sporting event, to entertain, and to inspire. That is a beautiful and rare chance, and it filled me with happiness and hope.

At no point in life will you feel more alive than in a ring fight. You walk out from backstage with an entourage and music blasting, through a sea of hundreds of people who paid good money just to



**Showing respect before the fight**

see you. As you step into the ring, what first gets hit is your senses. It's fantastically bright. The lights are also amazingly hot. When the ring announcer calls your corner, camp, and name, there's a huge swell of adrenaline as hundreds of people scream. You look across the ring and you're trapped, locked into a fight with another human being that is now going to happen, no matter what. And then the bell rings, and you become

the moment. Everything is much faster than training and sparring, a flurry of blood, sweat and muscle, and flashing blue and red gloves. It's indescribably tiring; your corner has to scream at and

slap you in between rounds just to get you to hear them; things hurt, but in a different, more out-of-body way, the pain masked by the dump of adrenaline. And then it's all over.

I ended up losing that fight as well. I did a few good things, landing some good leg kicks, a handful of hard punches, throwing a solid teep and at least one good knee. My opponent fought his fight exceptionally well. He stayed outside and used his length well. I had a tough time tracking him down to get in front of him and swing. He ended up finding me with a big right hand as he was falling away and I tripped. What I remember was a giant light switch flipping the lights off throughout the entire room, then flipping them back on, me realizing I was still standing, and then seeing Coban look into my eyes and wave off the fight.



My opponent Joe's knock out punch



Looking back, I didn't lose the fight because of something I *didn't* do. I lost because my opponent also did stuff, and some of his stuff just happened to get me good. Getting back to how "Fighting Solves Everything." I trained hard for both fights. Private lessons, fight training, training ten out of the twelve days leading up to the fight. This while working two jobs, volunteering, doing all the other stuff in my life.



Getting in a good clinch knee

This is where the carryover is to life in general, and why, that particular instance of *fighting*, indeed helped me to *solve everything*. The only thing we are sure of in this life is that it is going to end. We're only guaranteed one shot at *anything*. If you give everything you have, even if you don't win in the sense of being the victor or gaining a tangible or monetary result, you win knowledge, self-discovery—knowledge and self-discovery that others who don't try don't have.



There is something incredibly profound in the self-knowledge gained from putting your entire being into something, regardless of the outcome. For me, it was the realization that I *could* be aggressive, *could* want to hurt somebody if I had to. That I *could* get out of my own head enough to just fight, just be in the moment. And that I *could* fight back from substance abuse to finally compete in a serious sport, even at 32.

So from that fight, even more so than before, I realized, "Why wait?" I used to think the absolute worst thing that could happen was that you tried something and you died. That's silly—you die anyway. The *worst* thing that can happen is that you learn something about yourself.

And that is where the important message of this chapter begins, "Develop Your Passions." To be honest, I had played around with another title for this chapter, "Find Your Strengths," but I realized that wasn't quite the point. The idea wasn't only to find something. It was to both find something and keep something. And that something didn't necessarily even have to be something you were good at, so not a "strength" per se.

Passions don't have to be something you're great at, and they certainly do not have to be something from which you earn money, although it can also be great if this turns out to be the case. Find something that moves you, that makes you happy, that it gives you pleasure to think about.

What have you always been interested in but never done? For me, it really took a long time to "develop" my passion for martial arts. I didn't get to do karate when I was a child, did get to do it as a young adult but couldn't develop the passion (even though it was something that I enjoyed) because I hadn't engaged my weakness, alcohol, and finally got to with Muay Thai a bit later in life.

Think of things that have always interested you but you've never tried. I still have a good list, so I'll start. I want to learn the violin. So what if I'll be 33 this year and so what if the violin is a hard instrument and so what if it'll cost money.

I'd like to pursue a new challenge with Japanese also. I think there is a lot of ancient Japanese culture that just doesn't exist for English-reading audiences because the documents relating to it haven't been translated. I think it would be both fun and productive to learn how to translate that ancient Japanese.

I'm going to die, and when I get to be old and look out over the sea and think back on my life, will I be happier having known what it felt like to have played the violin, or worked more with Japanese, however well or poorly, or do you think I'll take comfort in the fact that I listened to excuses other people made up for me and never opened up a part of my mind to something new? That's the perspective you have to have.

And that makes it easier, as I'm sure you have a list like this. Travelling, practicing an art, learning a language, volunteering, writing a book—the only thing standing between you and any interest is your own decision to engage it. It's really that simple. So start right now. Price airline tickets, open up Word and start writing, buy a guitar, go to the SPCA and get a dog.

But, what does this have to do with paleo? A lot actually, in a few different respects. Again, paleo isn't just a way of eating—it's an answer to the simple question of "How should human beings live to be happy?" Part of being happy is not being a slave to work and money and doing things that you enjoy.

Mark Sisson talks about this wonderfully in *The Primal Blueprint*. We just aren't made to live a life that idolizes stress. Yet that's exactly what we've created. People are proud of the fact that they don't "have time" because of their work schedule. I've been living what I consider a pretty balanced life of work, hobbies, play and relaxation for going on four years, and even when I get more *productive* work done in the three hours in the morning and go to take a long lunch for a nice paleo meal and read a comic or walk through the park or watch an episode of Star Trek, there's still that voice telling me I'm lazy. That's when I have to be objective: I have my health, I am happy, I have

good relationships, I have fulfilling hobbies, I have most of my bills paid. Everything about my life is qualitatively *much better* than when I was a fat alcoholic 14-hour-a-day desk monkey. It's a reality.

So that's the first part of how this relates to paleo: these passions *must be*, in my opinion, part of a healthy lifestyle, and the paleo lifestyle is the answer to the question of "What is a healthy lifestyle?" In this way, to me paleo is life and life is paleo.

The second and immensely key idea here is that *health will make you better at everything in life*. I think this is another simple and undeniable concept, yet one we as a society have completely missed. The mind and body (again, all the same thing) are the basis for all of our interactions with the world. There is nothing else. If you think your brain is separate from your body, well then, you need a big reality check.

Health forms the foundation onto which the blocks of a successful, happy life are built. You will be better at your work in good health. You will be more successful in dealing with people in good health. Any passion you decide to develop, you will be better at in good health. In this way, it is both an ends in and of itself—feeling good is its own reward—and a means to other ends: health gives you the ability to do so much more than disease.

## Lesson 4 Realize Paleo is the Only Way to Health

It's kind of a shame what we've done to the word "diet" in the United States. Instead of people understanding it to mean what it actually does mean, which is just the foods that we eat, when people hear the word diet now, it's something really unpleasant. Something that will make you suffer. Something where you will be hungry all of the time. Something that might make you sick. Something that will make you weak. And more than anything, something that seems impossible.

It's pretty amazing actually. We've taken a word that should have to do with things that are good for our health, the foods we eat, and changed it into something that we think of as unhealthy and impossible. That's a terrible and unfortunate thing. It's also why we can't think of paleo as just another "diet" in that sense, and so I'm going to make up a word to help us talk about the difference: "die-it," because you feel like you're going to "die" while you're on it.

There are tons of these. Check out the U.S. News & World Reports diet rankings. But, before you do, take a second and consider how silly this is. All human beings share 99.9% of the same DNA. Since we really are that similar, how could there be 25 very different ways to do things in the first place? It just doesn't make sense.

Sure some foods may agree with some people better than others—like some tolerate dairy better than others, some may need to avoid things like nightshades—but if we're all that similar, and we all have to eat, there have to be some basic guidelines to doing it right. That's where the idea of paleo comes in. Paleo isn't one option out of tons of die-its. It's the right answer to the question of "What should human beings eat to be healthy?"

Many people like to hide behind ideas like "find what works for you," and "different strokes for different folks." A lot of the time, these are just excuses for people who haven't found what works

for them, or aren't ready to make change. Here is the reality though: the majority of "what works" is *the same for everyone*. I'll repeat that, because it is critical: *the majority of "what works" is the same for everyone*. And you can't start to talk about what works for you until your body is in tune with the majority of what works for everyone, because you won't be able to feel it to tell. These things are very simple: eat whole foods, exercise, rest.

If you think about it, those three simple things really do get you 90% of the way there, and you can't argue that there is anyone who shouldn't eat whole foods, exercise, and rest. I have always believed very strongly that paleo doesn't need to be overcomplicated—for most people—and in fact can be *more beneficial* for many if it is not.

Take the first part: eat whole foods. Just the word "whole" takes away nearly everything that is wrong with the Standard American Diet. By just switching to whole foods, you immediately eliminate all factory foods as well as most grain products, certainly bread and pasta.

Nobody can argue that everyone needs to exercise in some way, but that also doesn't mean there is one size that fits all—again the best exercise is indeed the one that you will do. But the *exercise* part is the same for everyone.

If we also truly commit to "rest," we realize that we need a full night's sleep every night; we may need to take naps; we need to have period of unplanned relaxation and play, and we need actively work to eliminate excess stress from our lives: including making time for hobbies, avoiding or managing things we know will make us anxious, and learning to be happy and live comfortably within our financial means, without always having to have more to be happy. It really is very simple to me.

It's also about remembering that each one of these factors is just as important. So many people want to overlook one factor, again usually the one that is toughest for them. If you're exercising a lot but only really eating 50% paleo, you won't feel well. If you're exercising all the time and eating

100% paleo but sleeping five hours a night and never taking rest days, you won't feel well. If you're eating 90% paleo and getting enough sleep but not making time to exercise because you're "too busy," you won't feel well.

Again, the things we need to do are very simple, but we have to be very realistic with ourselves about whether we are actually doing them. While it may seem like an obvious thing to say, your actions are the only thing that produces results. Really, all that ever matters is what you've done. Not what you knew you should have done, or intended to do, or overanalyzed until you couldn't do, or wrote down but never did.

If you fool yourself into thinking you have done the one thing you know you have avoided doing because you just haven't created a good habit around it, don't pretend to be surprised when you don't feel well or don't see the results you want. Self-observation and critical thought are just as important to your own health they are in any other part of your life.

If you need to create a food log to really see what you are eating, do so. I personally do not because I only feel happy eating near-100% paleo and I don't like keeping records. The action wouldn't get me a result that I don't already have. It would be pure "busywork," and the time that I do have is precious.

Maybe you only need to keep one for a couple weeks to make sure your on track. Maybe you only need to when you don't feel well, or don't see the physical results you are looking for. That's fine too. Do things for a purpose. If you need to log to get results or simply enjoy it, do so. If you don't, don't.

Same is true for exercise and rest. Some people love planning and tracking workouts. For many it can be an enjoyable part of the paleo lifestyle. It can also let you make changes when you aren't feeling or looking how you want to. My feeling is that you should only spend time doing these if they help you be healthier, and by extension, happier. Creating meaningless, stressful tasks is unhealthy.

Keeping a record that helps you correct bad habits and achieve goals which by extension makes you happy is healthy. Yet we are talking about the exact same activity.

And let's take a minute and talk about time. Everyone has the same 24 hours in a day. Nobody has 23, and nobody has 25. Everyone gets the exact same amount of time, just like everyone gets the same number of bodies: one. Your health is the foundation of your life. Everything you do requires it: your work, your hobbies, your interests, your personal relationships, your education, your self-growth, and your happiness. So when you do not make time for it, you are simply borrowing against your own life, pure and simple.

The Earl of Derby (whoever that was, lol) in 1873, said that "Those who don't make time for exercise now will eventually have to make time for illness and disease." I would substitute "health" for "exercise," but this is the pure truth. But, I think the Dalai Lama perhaps said it best: "The Dalai Lama, when asked what surprised him most about humanity, answered, 'Man. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being that he does not live in the present or the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then dies having never really lived.'"

Think about it. What are you spending time on that's more important than your health? If you have a roof over your head, food in the fridge, and most of your bills paid, you have every reason to be happy—unless you aren't healthy, in which case you have every reason and every resource to spend time on your health.

Every single thing you will do in life you will do better through the health afforded by the paleo lifestyle. Let me list a few of the things I *never could have done without paleo*. Without paleo, I would never have taken the initiative to create my first website for my translation business. Without paleo, I never would have had the energy or the fitness and leanness required to start competing at

Muay Thai—one of the most physically demanding sports there is—after age 30. Without paleo, I never would have had the drive to publish my first book about my experience as a foreigner living in Japan. Without paleo, I would never have picked up the phone to call Big Brothers Big Sisters and volunteer as a mentor to a young boy. Without paleo, I never would have won and maintained the dream clients I now have for my translation business. Without paleo, I never would have had the courage to both believe in and put the hours necessary into building the first paleo recipe sharing site, FastPaleo.com, now one of my greatest passions. Without paleo, I wouldn't have had the self-conviction to see that there were so many people who really needed help with paleo motivation and



**Me and my Big Brothers Big Sisters lil Michael and his brother Ja'Ron enjoying a *How to Eat Like a Dinosaur* meal we cooked together**

mindset, and to use this self-conviction to create PaleoPositivity.com.

This isn't me bragging, although it does make me feel happy to write down all of the great things paleo has made possible in my life. Rather, it is a testimonial. One common theme in the things I have done since going paleo, both in the above accomplishments and just in my everyday life, has been my ability to be a better person to other human beings.

This brings up a critical yet often misunderstood point: taking care of yourself is the first step in

taking care of others. So, so many times I've heard people try to make caring for others—whether it is a sick loved one, or a personal training clients, or family members—an excuse for neglecting their own health. "Well, why don't you try making time for exercise when you have other people to look out for?" Guess what, I have. And guess what, I do a WAY better job at it when I myself am



healthy. Again, this is super simple to me. Anything is done better when you're healthy. If you need to take care of someone else, would you rather try to do it when you're healthy, or when you yourself need to be taken care of?

And let's take the same excuse and apply it to our work life with a splash of critical thought. I'm fortunate to have one job with a very measurable output: I translate Japanese into English. So I end up with a certain amount of English words in a certain period of time. I've been doing this particular job since before I was paleo, and I can tell you that with a full night's rest, having eaten a nutritious paleo meal the night before, and working only until I know I have reached the end of productive work, I get much more done, both on a project-by-project basis, and in terms of the business development and new projects like FastPaleo.com that I've been able to embark on with the extra time. In other words, it's very real: health leads to increased productivity. But it takes discipline to realize that the time spent putting healthy food in your body, sleeping, and relaxing will translate into needing to spend less time working yet getting more done, which in turn allows you time to eat healthy food, sleep, and relax...a positive cycle.

The biggest point here is that, just like me, there may be an entire beautiful life waiting for you, and the key to unlocking the door that leads to it is already right in your hands: the paleo lifestyle. I will talk about just how we make it a lifestyle in the next and final chapter, but the steps are right in front of you; they are easy; and they can be taken today, right now even.

## Lesson 5 Make Paleo a Lifestyle

I've noticed that one of the absolute most difficult parts of the paleo lifestyle for many people is the initial change. You can understand the theory, which, in its essence, is uncomplicated. You can understand what to eat—there are plenty of free paleo food and recipe resources available online. You know that you have to exercise. You know that you need to get a full night's sleep, rest and relax.

The first thing that can make this change hard is that people think it has to be more complicated than this—that they need perfect knowledge of the paleo diet before they get started. General Patton said that "A good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow." I believe this is absolutely true and have made every effort to apply it to everything I do. The reality is that perfection is illusion. No human effort is perfect because human beings themselves are imperfect.

In my own words, "If you make everything all or nothing, you'll end up with all of nothing." The essentials of paleo include a few very simple ideas—again—eat whole foods, exercise and rest. There is an idea in business called the Pareto Principle which applies well to the paleo lifestyle and in fact most of life quite well: 20% of the actions produce 80% of the results.

If you avoid processed foods and grains, find an exercise that you like to do and make an effort to do it several days out of the week, and make a genuine effort to get enough sleep and relax and have fun, that's really all you need to get the majority of the results. That's the 20% of the action that gets you the 80% of the results.

Let me give you a few ideas here by quoting another of my blog posts, "A lot of the time when I hear more esoteric or nuanced discussions of paleo, such as arguments over soy sauce vs. tamari/coconut aminos or concern over excess Omega-6 in dark chicken meat, or worries about what temperature olive oil oxidizes at to form free radicals when pan frying, it makes me wonder if

the people having these discussions are executing paleo basics with the consistency that would make these conversations at all relevant.” In other words, the complicated stuff really doesn’t matter without the basics, and to get started, and make change easier, it really is more effective to focus on what exactly it is you *need* to do to see results.

So that would be my first and probably most important piece of advice to those struggling to figure out how to start paleo: keep it simple, make it easy on yourself. I’ve found this is a good strategy for much in life: if you start out trying to understand something in its entirety, it becomes overwhelming and can make you want to give up more than keep going. So don’t do that. Get the processed foods, bad grains and legumes out of your diet. Find a way to move your body that you enjoy and do it. Sleep enough, relax, play. Believe me when I tell you that for most folks, that will get you 80% of the way there. You will most likely feel better, with simple changes.

So that’s the first part in dealing with change: keeping it simple. The second key idea is realizing that change is hardest at first. I can’t stress this enough, so I’ll use some extreme examples from my own life to show you what I mean.

Quitting smoking is perhaps one of the best examples. If you are reading this and have quit smoking, you will understand what I mean. It’s tremendously painful and difficult. Your body is crying out for something that is killing it—the ultimate paradox. You must go through something that is at the same time awful but in the end good for you. But after you make it through the first four days, you begin to feel not terrible, but good. Then after a week, you feel really good. Then after a couple weeks, you feel free and great, and the thing that you couldn’t seem to live without before is now something that thoroughly disgusts you.

Quitting cocaine was just the same thing for me. Hard drugs very literally kill your body, very quickly for many. The change involved in quitting cocaine is horrific at first: cold sweats, poor sleep, terrible cravings (although, in fact, nicotine cravings are even worse), wild emotional swings, and perhaps the most uniquely terrible of the cocaine withdraw symptoms: wild paranoia and anxiety, so

strong that I still deal with them to some degree even today, four years, four months, eleven days and around four hours after the last time I had cocaine.

I remember coming home from the Philadelphia airport with my family and remembering distinctly the feeling of someone following us in the car behind us. I don't know, perhaps there really was someone. That's the strange thing about paranoid delusions, you think they're real. To this day, I still have a hard time driving or riding in a car at night. I think it brings my brain back to those frantic late-night early-morning cab rides in the middle of the night in Tokyo for coke. But I am worlds and worlds better than I was when I first stopped.

I dealt with the alcohol withdraw as well. It has its own night sweats, chills and cravings. And I truly realized just how psychologically and socially dependent I was on alcohol. I've had more fun in



**Me and my girlfriend Melissa at Comicon. Guess what, there's a life of fun without alcohol.**

the past four plus years without a single drop of alcohol, and yet, when I first quit, I couldn't imagine a life without it. But it's there, and it's way more beautiful.

The point is the tougher the change at first, most always the greater the happiness at the end of the tunnel. After just one week off alcohol, cocaine and cigarettes, I felt fantastically better. Just waking up and doing everyday things like walking my dad's dog was genuinely fun.

A similar happiness came when I found paleo. My moods were much more regular; I slept better; I had more energy to do any number of things; and I finally found the body that I had always wanted, which made me more attractive to others,

which made me more confident, which in turn made me happier.

But to get these things, you have to really understand that paleo is a lifestyle. A big part of the problem with the approach to health in the United States is that we mistakenly make everything

modular. Everything has to happen in a week or a month; we want fast results, magic pills. Your health isn't something that's broken and gets fixed in a short amount of time.

Your health is something that exists with you until you die. So ask yourself, do you want to maybe feel better for a week or a month, or do you want to feel better for your whole life. It's really that simple.

I think one of the biggest keys is forming positive habits. I'd like to go through a good bunch of them which have been really helpful for me. They are all simple, but as the saying rightly goes, "Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out." These are all habits that I actually use, that I actually *do*, day in and day out, not what I think you *should* do or merely have read that might be good. I have proven that they really work for myself, and never skip them. I'll go through them in order of a full day, from going to sleep to going to sleep again.

The first is a bed time. I have found that sleep is an area that does indeed vary slightly by individual, but everyone has one they need to find. Mine happens to be 10pm. I definitely have established a sleep routine. I like to get a hot shower before I get in bed. I don't usually fall asleep until a little before midnight, as it takes my mind a bit to wind down, and I need this time. I'll spend an hour or so watching a movie, or playing on Facebook, then turn stuff off and start to fall asleep.

The next part of my routine is that I sleep in a completely dark room. This is a point Robb Wolf has driven home in his book and blogging, but I have found the difference to be very truly night and day. I felt like I had a new lease on life after really darkening my bedroom. I blacked out my windows, either removed or taped over even the smallest electronic appliance light—*pitch black*. And oh, was it wonderful when I did.

I thought for a while I just wasn't someone who slept through the night. I still get up to pee maybe once, but besides that, I'll sleep fully until morning, great, restful, dream-filled REM sleep. So, if you really are interested in real sleep, black out your bedroom.

The next thing I do is wake up without an alarm. I have done this for going on five years, and it is one of the single most important things I have ever done for my mental and overall physical

health. I am not someone who wakes up super early. This is not me making excuses or trying to justify a lazy lifestyle. I do a lot when I'm awake. I've tested it. I fall asleep around midnight, and wake naturally at around 8–830. Occasionally I'll wake much earlier than that, at like 4:30 and go with it and write (writing this paragraph happens to be one of those occasions, as it's 5:46am now) and occasionally I'll be tired and need to sleep in, until 10 or even some days until noon, and I never fight it.

I know my body. I can't live my life tired. I can't translate well, or write well, or be positive on FastPaleo.com, or train with focus and heart, or generally be in a good mood. I get nothing *more* from being awake more hours while tired.

Frankly, I can't understand why anyone would want to. I get more done, am happier, feel better, am leaner, and am overall much healthier when fully rested than when not. To me, the choice is simple: sleep less, feel bad, get less done, be in bad shape, and die earlier—or—sleep enough, feel good, be in good shape, and live long.

If you're saying you have a job that doesn't allow you to do that, first I would say, do what you can. Go to bed earlier, early enough that you start to wake up naturally at whatever time you had to set the alarm to wake up at before. Also, realize that you are in control. If you have a job which constantly forces you to be tired, is that something you really want? If you have the ability to freelance or start your own business to get control of your life and get enough sleep, realize that that decision is available to you. Sacrificing health for money is perhaps the worst life decision there is. Have the courage not to make it.

The next habit I feel will truly make you happy and successful with paleo is everyday cooking. I just finished a conversation with a friend of mine asking for help with paleo. I let him know about the Cheat Sheet and free recipes on FastPaleo.com, to which he responded, "James—I can't cook worth a shit. I'll take a look and pray I don't burn down my apartment." My friend goes to college and does martial arts and writes poetry, he really can figure out how to cut up meat and vegetables

and move them around in a pan for a few minutes. Most anyone can, because basic cooking is really easy.

I think there are a couple mental barriers. I think one is that somehow cooking is high-culture, something chefs with fancy hats do in fancy restaurants. It can be that, but the kind of cooking *required* to eat *really* healthy is pretty simple. Use a chef's knife to cut vegetables and meat, put fat in a frying pan, move the stuff around. I've literally taught a 5 and 9 year old to do it, with my supervision of course, because it's that easy. Bacon and eggs should take you at best a handful of times to learn how to make. A salad is not much more than cutting stuff. Hamburgers you form with your hands and put it a pan. Chicken stir fry: pretty much the same thing as the salad except now you just have to heat a frying pan and move the stuff around. Take a week or so of practice and you will have pretty much all the skills you *need*.

I think another barrier, for men, can be gender norms. Some men think that the kitchen isn't a manly place for them to be. All I'll say about this is cook your lady a nice home-cooked meal, then get back to me.

Eating out is another place where it is essential to build good habits. The first example of this is what you eat at work. If you work at an office or anywhere else outside of your home, you *need* to bring food with you every day if you want to be healthy. Paleo actually makes this pretty easy.

There are lots of meats you can do a week's worth of on a Sunday and then take to work with you throughout the week. Get a baking dish and throw several pounds of chicken pieces in it, season and bake it, and you have a week's worth of chicken. You can easily do several pounds of ground beef in a large cast iron pan and then bring it with lettuce leaves for wraps. Salads are easy to make in quantity. Fruits can be taken with you whole or you can make fruit salad. Scrambled or hard boiled eggs are another thing it is easy to do a lot of at a time and keep. Find a handful of dishes that are easy for you to prepare and that you like, and keep it simple with those.

I eat a pretty similar lunch most days. I'll have eggs, a bit of breakfast meat, a piece of fruit, and a bit of the kale salad that I make a bunch of at a time. Diet is 80% of health. If you take two

hours out of the week to cook, that is 1% of your week. The choice becomes easy once you realize what is important.

The next place to have a good strategy in place is at restaurants. I have a few simple things I do here that have allowed me to always keep to my paleo every time I've been out to eat in the past three years of paleo. Again, to me everything is about keeping it simple.

What's the simplest solution? Pick a restaurant ahead of time that you know is going to be paleo friendly! This is pretty easy for me here in Philadelphia. I have a favorite Vietnamese restaurant where I get a beef and watercress dish, pork and raw vegetable dish and coconut juice. There is an all-you-can-eat Korean BBQ. There is an all-you-can-eat American BBQ. There is an all-you-can-eat sushi place (white rice is a "sometimes food" in my paleo). Maybe you are sensing an all-you-can-eat theme here? Have a plan. It's really not so tough.

Eating out can be fun if you just plan ahead and pick a place that is paleo-friendly. I eat out around once or twice a week, and always keep it paleo at the restaurant. But since I pick fun places with stuff I enjoy eating, it's still a treat to me, and that is important for mental and overall health.

If you do find yourself at a restaurant unplanned, first, don't freak out. Second, don't just give up either and throw the baby out with the bath water. There are always *better* options. At most any place, you can get a salad with some type of meat on it. Get an entrée and just skip the bread and sub a vegetable for the pasta or bread whatever other undesirable it comes with. Restaurants are getting more and more familiar with "gluten-free," and there is less and less of a stigma attached.

This can be an instance where you may have to deal with questions or criticism from people you are eating with. If it is, first remember that you decide what you eat and what makes you happy, just like they do. Your choices have nothing to do with their choices, and are not intended to make them feel one way or another.

When we are stuck in situations where we must face criticism, we have to stand up for ourselves and deal in facts. Here is a sample conversation:



"Why don't you just eat normal?"

"I'm choosing to eat what I know will make me feel good."

"Don't you ever eat anything fun?"

"This is fun to me, and it makes me happy to eat it."

"What, are you trying to make me feel bad for eating this?"

"Of course not. I'm eating what makes me happy. How you feel about what you eat is up to you."

Like Joe Friday, "Just the facts, ma'am."

This brings up another key issue, the people you surround yourself with. I remember one instance where a friend of mine who had had success with paleo posted an article on grains on Facebook. A mother of a friend of hers commented, saying something to the effect of "So you're saying I'm a bad mother for feeding my children cereal and the occasional hamburger helper?" No, actually you said that. I was just sharing a piece of information. The comments then broke down into something really toxic and unproductive, and I don't think my friend speaks to this person or her mother anymore.

That's an extreme and unfortunate example, but it happens, and it calls into question what exactly a friend is. Paleo is rooted in a desire to be healthy and happy. Anyone who truly cares about you should want both of these things for you. I remember one guy on the International Paleo Movement Group describing us as "aggressively happy," in a good way, and I think that can be right. We've found what works, are excited about it, and want to share it with others.

This can cause people to be self-conscious, even defensive, and even mean. But we have to remember that how people react to anything is *their* decision. I think what is also important to

remember here is that when people lash out, it can often be a cry for help in disguise. Paleo health is self-evident, and when people see you feeling and looking good when they're not, envy can manifest itself in anger.

How much you want to engage with others who are less than supportive is up to you. If you are just getting started, I think that maintaining as supportive an environment as possible is important.

Lots of the times, your habits dictate the company you keep. If you are out drinking late every night, you will likely be surrounded by a lot of people who are out drinking late every night. If you are getting in a workout in the gym in the morning before work after a good night's sleep, you will likely be surrounded by people who are getting in a workout in the gym in the morning before work after a good night's sleep.



**Me and my gym buddies cheesing out**

I'm fortunate, in that I work from home, that almost all the direct social interaction I have is with people who are supportive of my lifestyle. I go to my kickboxing gym, and everyone is healthy and fit, and lots of people are into paleo and eating right. I go to my chiropractor's office, and

we talk about nutrition while he adjusts me. I go to the acupuncture clinic, and they ask me how my body is feeling and what areas need attention. I go to pick up my meat order from the local farm, and the farmer is interested in FastPaleo and what I think of his beef.

Once you become in charge and start forming the habits that will make *you* happy, the people that you need to be surrounded by will fall into place. But, *you* must decide to take charge. I don't have an almost completely supportive environment by chance, I have one because I made decisions that I knew would benefit me.

One of the most overlooked and simultaneously important part of the paleo "lifestyle" is real rest, relaxation and play. *The Primal Blueprint* covers this nicely, although I think it is an important point to reinforce. I remember a private client I had once who described to me her six-day-a-week CrossFit schedule combined with repeated sleepless nights while her band was on tour, and then wanted me to evaluate her near-100%-clean paleo diet and fully documented macros for clues to weight gain.

When I told her to work out three or four days a week instead of six, always get a full night's sleep, and make sure she had some amount of unscheduled time for rest and relaxation, she was almost angry, certainly indignant at first I would say.

I felt like she had expected some high-level analysis of the remaining 5% of her diet that could possibly be tweaked as the solution, whereas the solution was an enormous one that had nothing to do with that and was staring her right in the face. What bothered me even more was that after I gave her this advice, which was, indeed uncomplicated, because that is what it needed to be, she repeated the same question about diet almost verbatim on IPMG, and everyone gave her essentially the same answer.

But, I understand this, and while it was a bit frustrating at the time, I'm not angry or upset about it. As I mentioned before, almost everyone's biggest challenge is the one they also want to

overlook. I was the exact same way. For me, it was alcoholism, and I made myself overlook it for around ten years.

I have to say that, from my interaction with the paleo community, rest and relaxation are probably the most overlooked factors preventing them from reaching optimal health. People are always looking for what they aren't *doing*, what they can *add* to their routine to get *more* results, when they more often than not have the opposite problem.

I remember one post from someone who actually had a job working with paleo describing how busy her day was and wondering what kind of fruit to eat and what kind of tea to drink and what kind of herbs to add and a litany of other questions about what to *do* to make a cold go-away. I think, in this way, we still easily fall victim to the conventional wisdom, US, allopathic approach to medicine that leads us to believe that we have to add some agent to our body to fix it when it is broken. I'm not saying Vitamin-C rich fruits and herbal tea aren't great when you have a cold, I'm saying neither one of them is close to being the most important thing that will heal your body: rest.

I find this to be just as true with exercise. The results of the exercise don't come from the motion alone. For your body to rebuild itself into something leaner, fitter and healthier, it needs rest as well. Weight training is perhaps the most obvious and yet somehow still most overlooked example of this. You cause micro-trauma trauma to your muscle tissue and increase your metabolic rate with exercise. Then rest and proper nutrition help translate this into a leaner more muscular body as the muscles rebuild themselves and you metabolize fat and boost your resting metabolism. Yet people want to skip the second step, as if its only the active part of the exercise that produces the results, essentially doing things wrong on a very basic level.

This amounts to overtraining, which over time can lead to increased fat, an injured immune system, real fatigue, and even clinical depression, which I have seen firsthand. In my sport, Muay Thai (Thai kickboxing), this is termed "training sickness," and it is just that.

I'm very careful to train no more than four days a week except for the week before my fight, because I know if I push past that on a regular basis, it starts to become both taxing on my body

and unenjoyable. While it may seem counterintuitive, rest takes discipline. Paleo people are mostly driven, energetic and enjoy their sport or exercise. We also live in a culture of “more is better” and of constant goals and of always challenging ourselves. But much of life is about dualities. To be productively active, we must also actively rest. To enjoy our hobbies the most, we must take time to do nothing.

I have a good handful of things I do for rest and relaxation to strike a balance with my Muay Thai training. Naps are one of the most important ones. An afternoon nap of anywhere from twenty minutes to two hours does wonders for both energy levels and recovery.

Yoga is another great one. It is, more than anything, calming. Muay Thai is competitive, skill-based, intense. You have to pay attention, try to get better, and do it while other people are trying to punch and kick you. Yoga is the opposite of that. You don't have to try too hard. I never do, and that makes me feel relaxed and good. It slows my mind down instead of speeding it up. It strikes a good psychological balance with the “yang” that makes up the rest of my life, and I like it very much for this.

Body care is another way I like to actively rest. The first form of body care I do regularly is chiropractic care. I can't stress how essential I have found this to be for my overall health. Next to my rent and grocery money, I consider it an essential expense. I feel better, train better, get more and better work done, and am in overall better health when I get adjusted weekly. It has become something I very much enjoy and look forward to, and is one way of staying “active” at times when I am not exercising.

Another is acupuncture. This I find is something that I need around monthly. I go to the community acupuncture center, which is priced very reasonably, and get treated. I've found it helps me in many ways: it alleviates muscle and nerve pain, makes my senses more acute, is calming, and, perhaps most importantly, helps me to sleep regularly.

Another is the Russian banya. The banya is a combination of extremely hot steam saunas and cold plunges (think *Eastern Promises* or *Red Heat*, minus the knife fights and naked women). From

the “Health Benefits” section in the Wikipedia banya entry: “The banya is said to have many health benefits. Excessive heat stimulates sweating, thus removing unwanted materials from the blood and improving the work of the kidneys. Sweating also releases excess water and salt from the body and opens the skin pores, cleaning it and making it softer and fresher. The process helps rid the muscles of excess lactic acid. Dilated blood vessels increase the flow of oxygen to muscles, reduces swelling and aids in the repair of tears. Steam bathing also stimulates protein circulation, improving digestibility of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, and mineral elements. Because harmful bacteria and viruses can only survive within a narrow temperature range, the use of banya to create an ‘artificial fever’ may aid the body in protecting against them. Finally, [endorphins](#) are released due to the increase in cardiovascular activity.”

I’m often banged up and sore from Muay Thai and kettlebells, and when I feel like the wear and tear is accumulating, I head to banya and it takes a lot of it away. I come out feeling much less sore, much more flexible, happier and with clearer skin.

They can get a bit expensive regularly, but every few months or so I like to get a full-body massage also, and will go tanning *every once in a while*. There are lots of different ways to take care of your body in addition to exercise and diet, and a lot of them will help you strike a balance both in terms of time and rest and relaxation. Try different forms of body care and see which ones make you feel good. For me, some like chiropractic are essential and regular, and some are more of a once-in-a-while type of thing.

Play is another one. I like going to the comic book shop and buying sneakers, two of my few material pleasures, but hey, at least they’re art. I like watching reruns of Star Trek the Next Generation on Netflix. I like playing with my dogs and cats. I like going to the park or woods and just walking around. Going food shopping is play. I like getting tattooed. I like reading books on philosophy. Sometimes, doing absolutely nothing is exactly what I need. Play and relaxation are essential, both for the well-being they bring and for how much better they make you at the “active” parts of your life.

I think the highest and most satisfying level of the paleo lifestyle is complete self-awareness. Knowing exactly how much you need to exercise. Knowing exactly when and how much to rest. Knowing exactly what foods to eat when to make you feel good. Knowing what kind of social situations are nurturing and which to avoid. To get to this point, you need to first understand yourself and then embrace the lifestyle in all its elements, only then will you reach the point where you understand, in every way, "what works for you."

## My Hope for You

What this is about, more than anything else, is how we find happiness. In my experience, the easier roads to happiness, for me drug and alcohol abuse, are both less satisfying and potentially destructive. Often we can find much more profound and lasting happiness when we make choices that may seem a bit more difficult. At some level, I do believe health is an integral part of anyone's happiness.

Maybe health to you is being freed from an autoimmune condition like celiac disease. Maybe health to you is reaching a weight where you feel confident and happy in your body. Maybe health to you is being physically able to compete in a sport you love. Maybe health to you is just being able to play with your kids. Maybe health to you is overcoming an eating disorder and discovering a nourishing relationship with food. Maybe health to you is achieving fantastic body composition and being able to compete in a figure competition. Maybe health to you is feeling emotionally well enough to try things you've never tried before.

The possibilities for newfound happiness that are available to you through the health provided by the paleo lifestyle are infinite. Yet, what is identical for everyone is the fact that, on some level, health and happiness are indeed the same thing. Find health, and you will find happiness. That is my hope for you.





