

THE BIG IDEAS

+1 or -1
Bite by bite.

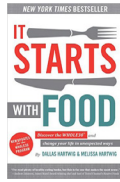
An Experiment of ONE
Ready to run it?

Paleo, Demystified
Quick look.

Good Food Standards
Four of them.

Grains
Do you *really* need to eat them?

Personal Health Equation
Starts with food and...



It Starts With Food

Discover the Whole30 and Change Your Life in Unexpected Ways

BY DALLAS HARTWIG & MELISSA HARTWIG · VICTORY BELT PUBLISHING © 2014 · 328 PAGES

“We eat real food—fresh, natural food, like meat, vegetables, and fruit. We choose foods that are nutrient-dense, with lots of naturally occurring vitamins and minerals, over foods that have more calories but less nutrition. And food quality is important—we are careful about where our meat, seafood, and eggs come from, and we buy organic, local produce as often as possible.

This is not a ‘diet’—we eat as much as we need to maintain strength, energy and a healthy body weight. We aim for well-balanced nutrition, so we eat both plants and animals. We get all the carbohydrates we need from vegetables and fruits, while healthy fats like avocado, coconut, and olive oil provide us with another excellent source of energy.

Eating like this allows us to maintain a healthy metabolism and keeps our immune system in balance. It’s good for body composition, energy levels, sleep quality, mood, attention span, and quality of life. It helps eliminate sugar cravings and reestablishes a healthy relationship with food. It also works to minimize our risk for most lifestyle-related diseases and conditions, like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, stroke, and autoimmune conditions.”

~ Dallas Hartwig & Melissa Hartwig from *It Starts With Food*

This is a *super* popular book in the Paleo movement that, as the sub-title suggests, introduces us to the Whole30 and can change your life in unexpected ways.

[Dallas Hartwig](#) and [Melissa Hartwig](#) created the Whole30 that has inspired tens of thousands of people to follow their plan and change their life.

I’m one of those people. As a vegan for nearly a decade, I was *extremely* hesitant to even explore any other path let alone read a book all about Paleo principles.

But, alas, shortly before Emerson was born four years ago, Alexandra read the book and inspired me to do so as well. I’ll talk more about how my life changed as a result in the Note.

The book walks us through the vision behind the Whole30 plan and combines fun, witty, tough love with common sense, science, and their invitation to make YOURSELF an experiment of one. It’s a super practical guide to rebooting your health that comes with an uber-passionate and supportive community.

If you’re feeling it, I think you’ll dig it. (Get a copy of the book [here](#) and learn more about Whole30 [here](#).)

As you’d expect, the book is packed with Big Ideas and I’m excited to share some of my favorites so let’s jump straight in!

“The food you eat either makes you more healthy or less healthy. Those are your options.”

~ Dallas Hartwig & Melissa Hartwig

*"You cannot 'out-exercise'
poor food choices and
the resulting hormonal
disruption."*

~ Dallas Hartwig & Melissa Hartwig

+1 OR -1 BITE BY BITE

"We have a theory about food that directly influences the rest of the book.

The food you eat either makes you *more* healthy or *less* healthy.

Those are your options.

There is no food neutral; there is no food Switzerland—every single thing you put in your mouth is either making you *more* healthy or *less* healthy.

It should be simple then, right? Just eat the foods that make you more healthy.

Well, it is and it isn't."

Those are the first words of Chapter 1: "Food Should Make You Healthy."

Every bite we take is either making us more healthy or less healthy. +1 or -1.

Now, when we apply this +1/-1 idea to our lives in general, it's pretty straight-forward. What we're about to do in this moment is either a step forward into growth or back into not-so-great.

With nutrition, it's not quite as simple. We know some things that just aren't optimal (hello, donut + can of Coke!) but there are a lot of other things that fall into the ambiguous zone of confusion given all the different nutritional theories out there.

Helping us make the process easy is, of course, what this book is all about.

How we go about doing that is the subject of the next Big Idea.

P.S. Once you know what you believe is best for you, you may choose to eat food that you know is not making you more healthy—which, of course, is fine. We just want to do that consciously rather than compulsively and make that sub-optimal meal the exception rather than the rule.

AN EXPERIMENT OF ONE

"We're going to share our views on food. We'll share our personal experiences. We'll give you testimonials from others who have changed their lives just by changing the food on their plate. And we'll give you the science—the studies, experiments, and conclusions that form the basis for all of our recommendations.

And then we'll say, 'Don't just take our word for it.'

We are going to teach you how to turn yourself into a scientific experiment of one, so you can figure out for yourself, once and for all, whether the foods you are eating are making you more healthy or less healthy. And that's worth more than *any* scientific findings you read about—because there hasn't been a single scientific experiment that includes *you* as a subject.

Until now.

When you complete our Whole30 program, you'll see for *yourself* the effects of more healthy and less healthy foods. By the time the program is over, you'll know in no uncertain terms which foods are improving the quality of your life and which are detracting from your health. In just thirty days, you will have gained that incredibly powerful knowledge. Why is this knowledge so valuable?

Because it will change your life."

An experiment of ONE.

Ultimately, that's what this book is about—presenting a plan, backing it up with some science and clinical experience that supports their perspective and then, most importantly, teaching you how to TEST IT ON YOURSELF.

"Your hormonal troubles start with 'overconsumption': the chronic overconsumption of supernormally stimulating, nutrient-poor, carbohydrate-rich foods."

~ Dallas Hartwig & Melissa Hartwig

This is what got me and Alexandra to try the Whole30 approach.

We were weeks away from welcoming our son, Emerson, into the world. Alexandra was dealing with some skin issues that had persisted for over a decade—resistant to all of her attempts to resolve it via what we *thought* was a healthy diet. (At the time, that was a lower-fat vegan diet with a lot of grains.)

Alexandra read the book and was inspired by the possibilities of removing grains (one of the key things Whole30 removes) to see if that would help with her skin issues. I was (very) skeptical at first but I was open as I knew I could optimize my health as a) I always felt hungry and b) I got migraines once every month or two.

And... Ultimately, what got me to make the leap and test the approach was the fact that we were naming our son *Emerson* after one of my heroes: [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#). This brilliant line echoed in my head and became our mantra as we made the leap: *"All life is an experiment. The more experiments the better."*

If all of life is an experiment and the more experiments the better, then it was time to quit being so dogmatic and be willing to do some experimenting.

And, alas, the experiment worked for both of us. Alexandra's skin issues cleared up (and haven't returned) and my energy levels stabilized and, whereas I used to always be on guard that I may get a migraine if I skipped a meal or didn't get a good night of sleep, I haven't had to worry about migraines since removing the grains (+ veggie oils).

But, alas, that's just OUR data.

What's YOUR experience with different foods? The only way to find out is to remove the potential toxic triggers for a period of time and see what happens then, if you're feeling it, systematically add them back one by one and see what happens.

The Hartwigs present their Whole30 guide to do this. [Mark Hyman](#) has a similar 21-day reboot in [Eat Fat, Get Thin](#); [David Ludwig](#) has a 2-week reboot followed by a reintroduction phase in [Always Hungry?](#) and [Alejandro Junger](#) has his approach in [Clean Gut](#).

It's a REALLY powerful way to see what works for YOU.

Ultimately, that's the only science that really matters. So, grab your lab coat and let's get to work!

PALEO, DEMYSTIFIED

"Before we go any further, let's debunk some myths about the Paleo diet. First, it's not about recreating the existence of cavemen. No one wants you to go without electricity, hot showers, or your beloved iPhone. And yes, cavemen didn't always have a long life span, but that's not because of their food choices—it was more likely the lack of antibiotics, the abundance of predators, and harsh living conditions. Second, it's not a carnivorous diet—the moderate amount of high-quality meat is balanced with tons of plant matter (vegetables and fruit). Third, the fat you eat as part of a Paleo diet will *not* clog your arteries because fat all by itself is not the culprit in that scenario. (Really. More on that later.) Finally, the diet is not carb-phobic; it's 100 percent sustainable from day one, and it's really not that radical—unless you consider eating nutrient-dense, unprocessed food radical. Which, in today's microwave-dinner-fast-food-low-fat era, might very well be the case."

Although I don't consider myself "Paleo" per se, I DO think it's smart to look at how our bodies evolved and what we likely ate over tens of thousands/millions of years of evolution.

I like the way [John Durant](#) (in [The Paleo Manifesto](#)) walks us through the five different epochs of human existence (Animal, Paleolithic, Agricultural, Industrial, Information) and what we can learn from each to be healthy today. Check out that Note for more.

"Remember that old adage 'You are what you eat'? We like to take that one step further, borrowing a clever turn of phrase from author Michael Pollan: 'You are what what you eat eats.'"

~ Dallas Hartwig & Melissa Hartwig

Highlights for me include the fact that grains were a MINISCULE part of our diet pre-agricultural revolution and now we consume 150 pounds of wheat alone.

And, I love [The Happiness Diet](#) guys's comment: "Over the course of the past two hundred years, we've increased our sugar intake by 3,000 percent. This is the single biggest change to the human diet since the invention of fire."

And, of course, I don't think it makes sense to have 20% of our calories come from soybean oil—something that we DID NOT eat *at all* 100 years ago. I don't think we need to think about that too hard to realize that makes no sense. (Same goes for all veggie and seed oils, btw.)

Throw in all the other consequences of industrialized food processing and we see that we eat very little REAL FOOD—most of it is what Michael Pollan calls "edible foodlike substances." Again, it doesn't make any sense to me to eat foodlike stuff our great-great-grandmothers didn't eat and wouldn't recognize as food.

Sugar, grains, and veggie/seed oils are all removed from our diets on Whole30. The focus? Whole, real foods.

P.S. For me, the most challenging aspect of the Whole30 experiment was eating animals again. Of course, that's all part of a longer vegan vs. Paleo chat. But, what IS clear is that if we choose to consume animal products, we *must* stop eating food from factory farms.

99% (!) of all animals consumed in the US are currently raised in industrialized, factory farms. In addition to being horrific from both an ethical (treatment of both animals and employees) and that environmental perspective, it's also toxic for your health.

Factory-farmed animals are not fed their natural diet. They're fed seeds and grains (and other bizarre things) that makes them sick (hence, livestock get more antibiotics than humans) and disrupts the ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 fatty acids.

So, the Hartwigs advise: Choose the highest quality, grass-fed/organic/wild caught and most humanely raised animals you can. Make THIS organic before you worry about the veggies and fruits. And, if you *do* get industrialized animal products, stay away from the super-processed hot dogs and bacon and go with lean cuts. Although the fat in grassfed meat is healthy, the fat in factory-farmed products is NOT—not because of the saturated fat per se but because fat is where all the toxins (antibiotics, growth hormones, etc.) from their factory-farmed bodies are stored and then transferred to you.

GOOD FOOD STANDARDS

"We choose foods by following four Good Food standards. We're pretty picky about this: all the foods we recommend have to satisfy all four criteria. Not three, not most... all. We'll explain them in more detail in the coming chapters, but here are the basics.

The food we eat should:

1. Promote a healthy psychological response.
2. Promote a healthy hormonal response.
3. Support a healthy gut.
4. Support immune function and minimize inflammation."

That's from Chapter #3: "What Is Food?" in which we get introduced to the four criteria of the Whole30 good food standards.

Let's take a quick look at each:

1. The food we eat should promote a healthy psychological response.

This is Rule #1. Does the food we're eating trigger an unhealthy psychological response? David Ludwig has tested this extensively and PROVEN that ultraprocessed, fast-acting carbs light up your nucleus accumbens—the same “reward center” that lights up for people addicted to cocaine and alcohol. That would qualify as an unhealthy response. Which is why removing fast-acting carbs (sugar, pizza, bread, pasta, etc.) is part of his Phase I: Conquer Cravings.

2. The food we eat should promote a healthy hormonal response.

Ludwig echoes this wisdom as well. He tells us: “*Foods with similar nutrients can affect hormones and metabolism in profoundly different ways, determining whether we store or burn calories, build fat or muscle, feel hungry or satisfied, struggle with weight or maintain a healthy weight effortlessly, and suffer from or avoid chronic inflammation.*” The Hartwigs walks us through how our food choices affect everything from insulin to cortisol. Powerful stuff.

3. The food we eat should support a healthy gut.

As we discussed in [Clean Gut](#), it ALL starts in the gut. [Alejandro Junger](#) tells us: “*Healing the gut is the single most important step we can take to ensure our lifelong health.*” Again, certain foods are disrupting the health of our gut and we need to eliminate those toxic triggers!

4. The food we eat should support immune function and minimize inflammation.

Inflammation is at the root of ALL disease. Therefore, we want to make sure our food choices are anti-inflammatory rather than inflammatory. Key culprits: grains, veggie/seed oils, dairy.

DO YOU *REALLY* NEED TO EAT GRAINS?

“There is not a single health-promoting substance present in grains that you can't also get from vegetables and fruit.”

~ Dallas Hartwig & Melissa Hartwig

“The marketing from big cereal companies would have you think that cereal grains are highly nutritious—and that if you don't eat them, you'll miss out on all sorts of vitamins, minerals, and fiber that you can get only from grains.

That's simply not true.

Grains are not (we repeat, *not*) nutrient-dense *when compared with vegetables and fruit.*”

That's from a chapter in which we learn about the potential toxicity of grains.

First: Did you know grains are SEEDS? Yep. Wheat, corn, rice. All seeds from grasses.

One of the top 5 consequences of industrialized food production that [Michael Pollan](#) talks about in [In Defense of Food](#) is that we went from eating a ton of leaves to eating a ton of seeds. (Note: That wasn't a good switch.)

So, EVERYONE agrees that refined flour is not a good idea. Yet, a lot of people insist that “whole grains” are awesome and should be a staple of our diets.

I say, run the experiment on yourself. See how you feel with and without them. You may handle them just fine. I do not.

I also REALLY like this perspective: “Another way that a diet high in grains leads to suboptimal nutrition is in terms of opportunity cost: If there are more whole grains on your plate, then there's probably less of some other food—like vegetables—on your plate. And that lowers the overall micronutrient density in your diet too. In summary:

There is not a single health-promoting substance present in grains that you can't also get from vegetables and fruit.

That's a powerful perspective to consider: When we're loading up on grains, we're potentially loading up on toxic triggers and definitely crowding out room for vegetables—which have all the nutrients you'd get in grains without the potential risks.

*"Eating whole, unprocessed foods with a rich complement of fat is *not* unhealthy. Overeating refined carbohydrates *is*."*

~ Dallas Hartwig & Melissa Hartwig

P.S. In terms of the marketing of cereal grains, remember that, as Pollan tells us: "When corn oils and chips and sugary breakfast cereals can all boast being good for your heart, health claims have become hopelessly corrupt. The American Heart Association currently bestows (for a fee) its heart-healthy seal of approval on Lucky Charms, Cocoa Puffs, and Trix cereals... Meanwhile, the genuinely heart-healthy whole foods in the produce section, lacking the financial and political clout of the packaged goods a few aisles over, are mute. But don't take the silence of the yams as a sign that they have nothing valuable to say about health."

YOUR PERSONAL HEALTH EQUATION

"Of course, while we believe your journey to optimal health starts with food, there are other factors that also play important roles. Health and fitness is multifactorial, and while nutrition is always the foundation, we also believe that you cannot focus on just one aspect of health at the exclusion of others. Sleep, exercise habits, and stress also factor into your personal health equation."

Your personal health equation.

I agree with the Hartwigs that it STARTS with food. You can't out-exercise a bad diet and you're just not going to sleep or psychologically function optimally with a bad diet.

So, let's start there. And have fun integrating other Big Ideas from Movement 101, [Sleep 101](#), [Love 101](#), [Purpose 101](#), [Confidence 101](#), [Habits 101](#), [Creativity 101](#) and... :)

What experiment are YOU ready to run on your life to get your health and energy to the next level? Here's to rockin' that as we optimize and actualize and give our gifts to the world!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note,
you'll probably like...

[The Paleo Manifesto](#)

[Always Hungry?](#)

[Eat Fat, Get Thin](#)

[Food Rules](#)

[In Defense of Food](#)

[The Happiness Diet](#)

[Clean Gut](#)

[Grain Brain](#)

[Brain Maker](#)

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.