

THE BIG IDEAS

The Chief Goals

Here they are.

The Food Rules

Follow these.

High Fat

Requires low carb.

High Protein?

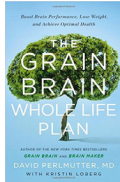
Not so much.

Coconut Oil

Superfuel magic. Using it yet?

Beyond Nutrition

More ways to optimize.



The Grain Brain Whole Life Plan

Boost Brain Performance, Lose Weight, and Achieve Optimal Health

BY DAVID PERLMUTTER, MD · LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY © 2016 · 304 PAGES

“You can choose your health destiny. Whether it’s effortless weight loss. Freedom from neurological disorders and other chronic conditions. Boundless energy. A radiant appearance. Sound sleep. A happy belly. A robust immune system. Relief from depression and anxiety. A sharp, fast-thinking brain. A great sense of self-confidence and well-being. A super-high quality of life...”

These are all terrific goals, and my bet is you’re hoping to achieve them yourself soon enough. People who’ve followed my protocols in the past have indeed experienced these results. Seriously. But to be sure: Such monumental accomplishments don’t come without hard work and sacrifices. You can’t necessarily turn away from the standard American diet—bread, soda, OJ, sugar, cereal, muffins, bagels, processed foods—and embrace a totally gluten-free, low-carb lifestyle overnight. It takes commitment. It takes effort. But it’s doable with this book in your personal library. ...

The main purpose of this book is to help you put my ideas into practice in the real world and to show you that living your best life is about much more than what you put in your mouth. It expands upon the core advice in my previous works and introduces exciting new information about the advantages of eating more fat and fiber, consuming fewer carbs and protein, evicting gluten forever, and catering to your intestinal flora. ... From sleep hygiene to stress management, exercise, supplements, and more, *The Grain Brain Whole Life Plan* details how to live happily and healthily ever after.”

~ David Perlmutter from *The Grain Brain Whole Life Plan*

“If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading.”

~ Lao Tzu

This is our fourth Note on [Dr. Perlmutter’s](#) work. We also have Notes on [Grain Brain + Brain Maker](#) + [Power Up Your Brain](#) (which he wrote with [Alberto Villoldo](#)).

As I mentioned in the other Notes, Dr. Perlmutter is a leading neurologist and nutritionist who offers compelling, cutting-edge perspectives on how to optimize our brains and our bodies.

(He’s also a kind and generous person who helped our family out when we had a scary medical crisis last year. (Alexandra had mold-triggered seizures we discussed in other Notes.) We will forever be grateful for his wisdom and support.)

This is a quick-reading book that serves as a guide to implementing the ideas in *Grain Brain + Brain Maker*. As Dr. Perlmutter puts it, those books cover the “why” while this one focuses on the “how.” (Get a copy [here](#).) (Also: Check out our Notes on Dr. [David Ludwig’s](#) *Always Hungry?* plus Mark Hyman’s *Eat Fat, Get Thin* plus [Melissa Hartwig’s](#) *It Starts with Food*—all of those authors have testimonials on the back cover and share similar, powerful wisdom! And, of course, check out [Nutrition 101](#).)

It’s packed with Big Ideas and I’m excited to share a few of my favorites so let’s jump straight in!

"No doubt there is a time and place for medications, be they over-the-counter or prescribed. But we live in a world where we are too quick to medicate, self-prescribe, and depend on pills."

~ David Perlmutter, MD

THE CHIEF GOALS

"It's amazing to me that in the wake of this epidemic of chronic illness and brain disorders, so few of us stop to think about how our daily lifestyle choices factor into our well-being. It's human nature to prefer the shortcut and ask for a prescription or seek a potion that we believe will make our problems disappear. Yes, there's work and effort involved in choosing to eat a certain way and avoiding the habits that get us into trouble, but it doesn't have to feel like a Herculean task. No sooner do you begin to feel better than you have more motivation to keep going.

So with that in mind, let's take a tour of the chief goals of the program:

- to reduce and control inflammation
- to turn your body into a fat-burning machine using fat
- to balance levels of beneficial bacteria in your belly
- to balance your hormones and increase leptin sensitivity
- to take control of your genes
- to balance your life."

That's from Chapter 2 in which Dr. Perlmutter walks us through the Chief Goals of the program.

Chapter 1 included some of the shocking and heart-wrenching health stats we face. 26% of US adults suffer from a diagnosable mental illness while, every 4 1/2 minutes, an American will die from the food they eat. Crazy.

That's the bad news. The good news is we can do something about it.

In fact, we can do A LOT. It's time to take control. Let's look at some Ideas to help us do that!

THE FOOD RULES

"Strive for progress, not perfection."

~ David Perlmutter, MD

"My wish for you is that you learn to live in a way that you can sustain for the long term. At this juncture, all I ask is that you make the most of my recommendations and tune in to how your body is feeling and changing. You are recalibrating one day, one meal, one thought at a time and will see the results build up over time. So take a deep breath, relax, and get ready to discover a whole new you.

Now let's get to the training grounds. Time to learn the dietary rules:

- Evict gluten (even if you don't think you have a problem with it).
- Go low-carb, higher fat and fiber.
- Abandon sugar (real, processed, and artificial).
- Avoid GMO foods.
- Watch out for too much protein.
- Embrace the incredible egg."

Time for the dietary rules!! (Not to be confused with [Michael Pollan's Food Rules](#). :)

Let's take a quick peek:

- Evict gluten (even if you don't think you have a problem with it). Perlmutter is unequivocal that we ALL need to ditch the gluten. Period. We talk about the negative effects of gluten in our Notes on [Grain Brain](#). Even if you don't think you have a problem with it, it's inflammatory for everyone; and reducing your inflammation (which is the #1 variable all diseases share) is our #1 priority. So, give gluten the eviction notice.

"Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after the other."

~ Walter Elliot

- **Go low-carb, higher fat and fiber.** Perlmutter is all about a low-carb, ketogenic diet and talks about the positive benefits. Combine that with higher fat and a ton of fiber (aka: a ton of "above-ground" veggies) and you've got the idea.
- **Abandon sugar (real, processed, and artificial).** As we discussed in [Nutrition 101](#), sugar is toxic. Perlmutter tells us to get rid of all the real, processed AND artificial sugars. Period. (And, remember, sugar has over 60 different names. They all need to go.)
- **Avoid GMO foods.** Did you know GMO foods have been banned in over 60 countries? Yah. Don't eat it. Easiest way to avoid it is to eat organic as organic food can't have GMOs in it.
- **Watch out for too much protein.** We're going to talk about this one more in a moment. For now, know that when Perlmutter says low carb, he ISN'T saying high protein. In fact, he's saying very moderate protein. (Like, max 8 ounces per day kinda thing.)
- **Embrace the incredible egg.** Perlmutter loves eggs and says we should, too. :)

There you go. A quick look at the food rules.

P.S. Dr. P, like all the other great nutrition teachers, tells us we need to get rid of ALL the foods in our fridge and pantry that don't meet those standards. He's all about going ALL IN.

Remember: [Willpower 101](#): Buy your willpower at the store. Don't tempt yourself. Just throw the junk away and never buy it again.

HIGH FAT REQUIRES LOW CARB

"The idea that we should restrict our saturated fat is not supported by the latest dietary guidelines. In fact, when the new 2015 federal guidelines were published, most people—health 'experts' included—were shocked to see that they had removed recommendations to limit the consumption of cholesterol-rich foods and added a nod to coffee as potentially being part of a healthy diet. Imagine that! The greatest risk to our health and to weight gain comes from replacing saturated fat with pro-inflammatory carbohydrates and sugars. We've got to welcome saturated fat back to the table. We've also got to embrace more natural fats in general, and not be afraid of a fat-driven diet. And we have to simultaneously lower our carb intake. High-fat and high-carb diets filled with gluten are the worst; not only do they wreak havoc on the metabolism and drive inflammation, but they also do a number on our gut bacteria. Study after study shows that the only way the high-fat diet works is when it is accompanied by low-carbs; and the more fiber, the better. Remember, it's the fiber that feeds those gut bugs and contributes to intestinal health."

As we've discussed a number of times in related Notes (see [Always Hungry?](#) + [Eat Fat, Get Thin](#), etc.), fat is NOT bad. In fact, it's *essential*.

BUT...

As you add fat, you've gotta reduce your carbs.

AND...

Add fiber. Aka, eat a lot (!) of veggies.

P.S. Are you still not sold on the whole "fat is awesome" thing? Perlmutter cites the same PREDIMED study that Harvard MD/Ph.D. [David Ludwig](#) references in *Always Hungry?*

It's worth the review: *"For fifty years, we've been told that a low-fat diet would protect us against chronic diseases. That notion inspired the Women's Health Initiative clinical trial which started in 1991 and also informed the design of the Look Ahead study, launched a decade later. The goal of Look Ahead was to reduce heart disease, a common complication of diabetes. The study, conducted in sixteen clinical centers in the United States, assigned*

about five thousand adults with type 2 diabetes to either a low-fat diet with intensive lifestyle modification or to usual care. The study, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 2013, was terminated prematurely for ‘futility.’ Analysis by independent statisticians found no reduction of heart disease among participants assigned to the intensive low-fat diet, and no prospect of ever seeing such a benefit emerge.

By coincidence, another study called *PREDIMED* was published in the same prestigious journal the very same year. This study assigned about seven thousand five hundred Spanish adults with heart disease risk factors to one of three diets: Mediterranean with lots of olive oil, Mediterranean with lots of nuts, or a conventional low-fat diet. The interventions did not involve a calorie restriction or weight loss goal. *PREDIMED* was also terminated early, but in this case because effectiveness exceeded expectations. Both higher fat groups had such significant reductions in cardiovascular disease (about 30 percent) that continuation of the trial would have been unethical for the participants in the conventional group.

These two recent studies should seal the coffin on the standard low-fat diet. More broadly, they show that modest improvements in diet—specifically, more fat and less processed carbohydrates—can prevent obesity-related disease at any body weight. A high-quality diet seems to calm down ‘angry fat’ even without weight loss. With weight loss, the health benefits could be huge.”

WE’RE NOT TALKING HIGH PROTEIN HERE

“Low-carb does not mean high-protein. The Grain Brain Whole Life Plan calls for a limited daily intake of protein no more than about 46 grams for women and 56 grams for men.”

~ David Perlmutter, MD

“Let me touch upon that other misconception I often hear. Contrary to what you might think, going low-carb does not mean going high-protein. You will not be eating meat every day. A lot of people think they need upward of 100 grams of protein a day, but in fact we only need about half that. Vegetarians often ask me if they should worry about getting enough protein, and I reassure them that they consume plenty from plant sources, legumes, eggs, nuts, and seeds. You probably eat more than enough protein each day, but you could be eating too much. Protein is an essential component of any diet, but more doesn’t mean better or healthier. Extra protein will not help you burn more fat, build more muscle, or render you stronger. If you consume too much of it, you’ll eat more calories than your body requires, store more fat, and put yourself at risk for an earlier death.”

Dr. Perlmutter makes it very clear throughout the book that he’s not advocating a high-protein diet and cites research pointing to the negative effects of too much protein.

In fact he advocates a very moderate amount of protein—3 to 4 ounces per serving; max 8 ounces per day, telling us that consuming around 50 grams of protein is plenty.

What’s that leave us with?

A TON of veggies. Specifically, “above-ground” non-starchy veggies.

Imagine your plate. 75% of it should be filled with greens and veggies. Side dish size of protein.

For me, it’s a jumbo-sized bowl stuffed with greens, sprouts, sauerkraut, etc. Topped with delicious an olive oil-based dressing and some protein.

P.S. He also tells us that vegan diets can be “wonderfully healthy as long as you’re getting good sources of vitamin D and B₁₂, and the omega-3 DHA, as well as minerals like zinc, copper, and magnesium.”

What he DOES worry about with vegans, though, is that they’re not getting enough fat so he encourages adding olive oil and coconut oil.

P.P.S. My #1 takeaway from the book is to experiment with a little less protein. I basically follow his (and Dr. Hyman’s + Dr. Ludwig’s) low-carb, lots of fat and tons of greens approach. Although

"Keep in mind, though, that an hour daily spent working out hard won't erase the effects of sitting down for the rest of the day."

~ David Perlmutter, MD

I don't go agro with the protein, I'm not as low as Dr. P is recommending. The +1% optimization continues!

P.P.P.S. Another big takeaway for me: Integrating a supplement he loves called coffee fruit extract. I'd never heard of it. (And neither had Alexandra—which says a lot—hah!) Excited to integrate. Although he makes it clear you can't supplement your way out of a bad diet, other supplements the good Doctor recommends include: DHA, coconut oil, turmeric, alpha-lipoic acid (I'll be adding this to my collection as well!), Vitamin D, prebiotic fiber and probiotics.

YOU USING COCONUT OIL YET?

"A note about coconut oil: This superfuel for the brain also reduces inflammation. It's known in the scientific literature as helping to prevent and treat neurodegenerative disease. Use more of it when preparing meals. Coconut oil is heat-stable, so if you are cooking at high temperatures, use this instead of olive oil. (And if you don't like cooking with it, then you can take a teaspoon or two straight, as if it were a supplement.) Coconut oil is also a great source of medium-chain triglycerides (MCT), an excellent form of saturated fatty acid. You can also add it to coffee and tea."

Are you eating coconut oil yet?

If yes, high fives.

If not, what are you waiting for?

A superfuel that reduces inflammation = magic sauce.

(Remember: Organic. Extra Virgin.)

BEYOND NUTRITION: HOW TO OPTIMIZE

"I've already discussed the ways in which we can positively affect the brain, such as physical exercise, getting restful sleep, following a ketogenic diet, and adding certain nutrients like curcumin and the omega-3 fat DHA. These techniques also have the added effect of reducing the stress our brains and bodies endure daily. Stress will always be a part of our lives; the key is to keep unnecessary stress at bay to preserve and promote those neuronal connections. And there are other means to positively impact the brain and its connections that have nothing to do with what you eat, how much you exercise, and how well you sleep. When we take a moment to change how we view the world around us, and to act in particular ways that further reduce the stress on our bodies, we are actually changing the physical and functional structure of the brain for the better. To this end, let me outline the four additional ways that can help support this outcome:

- Flex your gratitude muscle.
- Maintain strong social networks—mostly offline.
- Plan personal downtime.
- Get into nature as much as possible."

"Be strict about going to bed and getting up at the same time every day, 365 days a year. Don't shift your sleep habits on weekends or holidays or vacations."

~ David Perlmutter, MD

That's from a chapter called "Add Your Support Strategies" in which Dr. P walks us through lifestyle changes beyond nutrition that we want to adopt to optimize.

We've got the biggies of exercise and sleep, of course. Key things to remember here:

You can't exercise for an hour and call it a day. You've gotta MOVE throughout the day. Dr. P recommends at least 20 minutes of aerobic activity 6 days a week and a total of ~450 minutes of movement per week (including doing chores, mowing the lawn, etc.) (See [Movement 101](#) + our Notes on Movement for more Ideas.)

"Accept the challenges so that you can feel the exhilaration of victory."

~ George S. Patton

And, as we know, sleep is huge. "The quality and amount of sleep you get have an astonishing impact on virtually every system in your body. ... Indeed, getting quality sleep is a requirement for optimum well-being." <— See [Sleep 101](#) + our Notes on Sleep for more goodness here.

Then... We have those four additional ways to rock it. Let's do a quick tour.

- **Flex your gratitude muscle.** As we've discussed countless times, gratitude is big. (See Notes on [Thanks!](#) by [Robert Emmons](#)—the world's leading researcher on gratitude.) Perlmutter tells us that gratitude is like a muscle and shares cool MRI research that shows how regularly practicing gratitude actually builds a part of your brain—making it more likely you'll be more grateful. Me likey. What are you grateful for? (I'm grateful for YOU! Seriously. Thanks for your support! :)
- **Maintain strong social networks—mostly offline.** Social connections are HUGE. Good news for introverts (and especially for introverts choosing to be hermits for awhile like me!): Quality is more important than quantity.
- **Plan personal downtime.** Perlmutter shares some research on mice that, when constantly stimulated, never actually absorb the new information and learn. Same with us. We need to slow down, check out and let it all settle—whether that's meditation or going for a solo hike or just enjoying quiet time alone, this is key.
- **Get into nature as much as possible.** We've also talked about the healing benefits of nature (go forest baths!). You taking time to be outside? (I'm ALL about hikes these days! Ah...)

... Well, that's a super quick look at this great book. What's your key takeaway? How can you integrate that more into your life starting *today*?

Get on that and have another awesome day!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

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

[Grain Brain](#)

[Brain Maker](#)

[Power Up Your Brain](#)

[Always Hungry?](#)

[Eat Fat, Get Thin](#)

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Change Your Life](#)

About the Author of "The Grain Brain Whole Life Plan"

DAVID PERLMUTTER



David Perlmutter, MD, is a board-certified neurologist and a Fellow of the American College of Nutrition. He was the recipient of the Linus Pauling Award for his innovative approaches to neurological disorders. With his books now published in twenty-seven languages, Dr. Perlmutter is setting new standards for what healthy lifestyle means around the world. He is the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Grain Brain*, *The Grain Brain Cookbook*, and *Brain Maker*, as well as *The Better Brain Book* and *Raise a Smarter Child by Kindergarten*. He lives in Naples, Florida. Connect: drperlmutter.com.

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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.