

Local study to examine paleo diet for protective effects

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The paleo diet is high in meat, fruit, vegetables and nuts with no dairy products or grains. Credit: Shelia

Potentially groundbreaking research comparing palaeolithic and traditional healthy diets is the focus of a new Edith Cowan University study investigating whether the paleo diet can help protect against heart disease and diabetes.

Sometimes known as the "caveman [diet](#)", the paleo diet is high in meat, fruit, vegetables and nuts with no dairy products or grains—mimicking the presumed diet of palaeolithic humans.

US-based Dr Lorden Cordain details the premise in *The Paleo Diet* highlighting a belief the human genome has not had time to adapt to agriculture introduced about 10,000 years ago, given humans have existed for millions of years.

Lead researcher Angela Genoni, from ECU's School of Exercise and Health Sciences, says only a few small paleo diet studies have been conducted in the past, making this the first to directly compare outcomes against another diet.

"It's thought the paleo diet may help with protection

against developing diabetes because it eliminates almost all processed food and is very high in fruits and vegetables," she says.

"The lowering of the glycaemic load of the diet helps to reduce the potential for insulin resistance and diabetes.

"With respect to [heart disease](#), some of the studies overseas have shown a lowering of total cholesterol and LDL [low-density lipoprotein] cholesterol.

"Whether this relates to a decreased risk of heart disease is unclear because the long-term effects of the diet have not been examined."

Mrs Genoni says weight loss may occur due to the elimination of processed food and a reduction in the energy density of the diet.

The increased protein content of the diet is also thought to contribute to a feeling of satiety, reducing overall food consumption.

Forty women between 18 and 70 have been recruited for the study with half on Dr Cordain's version of the paleo diet (in keeping with other research) and the other 20 following Australian dietary guidelines.

Their cholesterol and [blood glucose levels](#) are being measured at the start and finish of the study period to assess their risk of diabetes and heart disease.

"The [paleo diet](#) excludes grain and [dairy products](#) but whether this poses any nutrient deficiency issues has yet to be determined as the nutrient intake of participants following the diet has not yet been analysed," Mrs Genoni says.

"In theory, calcium, magnesium and fibre intake may be suboptimal without these two major food groups but, depending on individual [food](#) choices,

this may or may not be an issue."

Mrs Genoni says results will hopefully be collated and published later in the year.

Provided by Science Network WA

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