

Health mythconceptions

By MARY HUHN

STOP taking your vitamins. Lay out in the sun. Don't eat so much fruit. This may run counter to just about everything you've heard from your mother — and everyone else — your entire life. But that's what a doctor suggests in a new book, "Evolution Rx: A Practical Guide to Harnessing Our Innate Capacity for Health and Healing."

Dr. William Meller isn't looking at modern science for his ideas, but draws his guidelines instead from our Stone Age ancestors.

Their diet was based mostly on meat and vegetables, he says — and yours should be, too. He notes that you should leave out anything that has do with grains, such as pasta and bread. Dairy he approves of, because cavemen would gnaw on bones for calcium.

His take on stretching before exercise? Don't do it.

"Can you imagine a caveman engaging in a program of stretching before heading out to chase down prey?" he asks.

Instead, all you need to do is warm up with a slower version of an activity — a jog before a run, for example.

Much of Meller's advice is counterintuitive — such as: "There is no difference between organic and nonorganic [food] as far as your health is concerned."

A few of Meller's Flintstones-inspired ideas may sound familiar: alcohol and caffeine are OK in moderation, we don't need eight glasses of water per day and a person's

nine hours of sleep each day should include a nap.

And some of his explanations nicely justify spending a Saturday afternoon looking for that perfect pair of pumps: "Because our ancestors spent so much of their time [hunting and gathering], we evolved to feel sustainable pleasure in the search," he says. "Shopping is just plain good fun."

Other tips might give pause.

"If sunshine were so dangerous, how could Stone Age people have spent their entire lives outdoors, mostly naked, and not dropped like flies from skin cancer?" asks Meller.

Instead, he proposes taking a sun bath in order to get a tan slowly and avoid sunburn. "It will decrease your risk of skin cancer," he says.

Despite his background as an internist who has been published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, not all Meller's guidelines sit well with other experts.

The dietary guidelines set forth in "Evolution Rx," for example, go directly against those of the USDA, which emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free dairy products.

"We should eat a diet that's more plant-based and has less red meat, which is high in saturated fat," says Dr. Lisa Young, a nutritionist and adjunct professor at New York University.

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What's fact, wh

Myth	Evolution Rx book
Lounging in the sun is a one-way ticket to skin cancer.	"Get at least half an hour of direct sunlight on at least half your body three days a week. The benefits of vitamin D from sun exposure far outweigh the risk of skin cancer."
Drinking eight glasses of water per day is essential to good health.	Because water was scarce during the Stone Age, our bodies are built to stay hydrated.
Avoiding tuna, swordfish and the like will prevent mercury contamination.	"Eat fish. Stone Age fisher folk ate a lot of fish. There have been no cases of human mercury poisoning from eating fish ever reported in Britain or the United States."
Organic food protects you from toxins.	"Don't worry about buying organic."
Vitamins are a necessary supplement.	"Our Stone Age ancestors survived without ever taking vitamins."
Cleanliness leads to godliness.	"Allowing children to play in the mud and rub their faces in the grass and flowers is just what their bodies need to avoid allergies down the road."
A healthy diet means following the USDA's food pyramid, which stresses whole grains, fruits and vegetables.	"Get at least 50 percent of your diet from meat and fish. Avoid bread, cereal, pasta, potatoes, rice, beans and other grains. None was on the menu in the Stone Age."
Stretching before exercise helps to avoid injuries.	"Stretching does damage. Warm up first."



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