

The Primal Blueprint Podcast – Episode #9: Guest Steve Levine Discusses Everyday Primal Blueprint Success Principles

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Brad Kearns: Welcome to another episode of the Primal Blueprint podcast here in the Auburn, California studios this week. I am Brad Kearns, your host, and I am with my neighbor and good friend, Steve Levine. If you haven't heard of him...he hasn't had too many books out and or a lot of big following but this guy is going to rock your world. We are going to talk about all things primal because I think I am talking to the number ONE enthusiast consumer of podcasts, books, and written material on the planet for primal, paleo, and ancestral health matters.

Steve Levine: Thank you, Brad.

Brad Kearns: So I thought we would talk today about how you got started. You have had quite a long journey here in the lo-carb world. Talk about how you got interested in this sort of health direction and go form there and talk about some of the hot topics that are on your mind lately.

Steve Levine: [00:01:02] I probably started like a lot of us out there. My family had a history of arterial stenosis so I always careful to stay away from the artery clogging saturated fats and eat a lot of heart healthy grains. But as I went in to my 30s and early 40s, my weight started creeping up. I am 6 feet tall and got in to the low 205 pound range and realized that I needed to make a change and of course, I always had to stay away from the Atkins idea because of the arterial stenosis, but someone convinced me to give it a try and I quickly dropped 20 pounds! At that point, I was just thinking, okay, so I will die young from all the diseases from eating the fats and I'll leave a good-looking corpse. But then flash forward to just a few years ago. Someone directed me to the work of Gary Taubes. Basically on sugar. That led me to the master tome of Good Calories/Bad Calories and I, of course, was just blown away by the massive perception change that was given in this country from the diet-heart- lipid hypothesis of Ancel Keyes and the carbohydrate/insulin hypothesis. That was actually 100 years old but was resurrected by Atkins and Gary Taubes. That sort of got me in to trying to go further with this. It wasn't until I found the work of Mark Sisson and his master tome, The Primal Blueprint, that everything started connecting to me. Not only did I have a better understanding of the science I first got from the journalist, Gary Taubes, but now from Mark Sisson, but also the lifestyle that could be associated with this. That really led me to further developments, which, I am sure we can discuss.

Brad Kearns: That's great. So when you got exposed to the Primal Blueprint and you took it to the next level, so to speak from starting out, with just the basic lo-carb strategy. What are some of the things that stood out for you and had you change your life?

Steve Levine: [00:03:00] Well, one of the things that I was impressed by was a lot of decisions I just made independently seemed to be affirmed by the entire Primal Blueprint approach. For instance, over a decade ago, I went from just casual hiking on weekends to basically walking every single day at least for an hour. I have a friend with a back problem and he was doing it and I was walking with him. It became second nature to me. I just had to have that movement everyday. I wasn't much in to many kind of risky type sports but that was just the nature of the way I liked to develop my life. Of course, reading through the Primal Blueprint and especially the resources of Mark's Daily Apple, I began to realize to that it is a real seminal way to live your life. At hunter gathers we were sort of born to have movement every day. The fact that I like to do it on weekends in our beautiful Auburn foothills in the nature is also pretty much part of what we are like. I like the nature and I am able to absorb the nature as we walk.

Brad Kearns: So I think a starting point for a lot of people who aren't athlete, I mean you said your weren't out there in the adult leagues hitting home runs over the fence. What could they do to get things going on the exercise front, simply?

Steve Levine: [00:04:19] Well, for me, the big change from just being a weekend hiker, was taking the walks during lunch. It is pretty simple if you have some flexibility in your workplace. You can either eat before or I usually eat after the walk. Go out and just walk as close to the full hour of your lunch break as you can. It makes an amazing difference in the way your day goes from then.

Brad Kearns: For the diet part, you have done a lot of investigation, it seems like you have landed on the fasting, intermittent fasting, and intermittent ketogenic strategy. Can you tell us how you got to that and how it is working for you?

Steve Levine: [00:04:55] One of the great things about the internet is that it is a tremendous source of information. But the problem with the internet is vetting that information to make sure that you are getting information from reliable and accurate sources. When I took this new approach a few years ago and began to get more and more into the paleo/primal movement and I started putting questions into the Google, the primary resource that came up over and over was Mark's Daily Apple. There are lots of other sources out there but they seem to me to be sort of the Wikipedia for the primal/paleo movement. It has been around for so long has such a wealth of information and is so trusted and reliable that I used it as my primary source.

I kept hearing about intermittent fasting and probably, like many of you, I am not even going to think about trying that because I am going to need a big meal before I take on the day. but as I learned more about it, I decided to give it a try. Now remember, I caution people, I had already been doing reduced carbohydrate living for close to a decade. Often, to the extent I do have carbohydrate loads, I do it later in the day. So without even knowing it, I was probably mildly ketogenic for many years so my body was already very well adapted to being a fat burner. But I didn't even fully understand that when I started this. I just went ahead and did my hike one morning without having my regular breakfast ahead of time and it was effortless. As you have heard others say before and you will hear it again, when I returned home that afternoon, there was no rush to go ahead to refeed. I did start my day about 1:00 in the afternoon with some nice eggs. There was no urgent compulsion to do so. That really shocked me and what I did find over the coming months, and I have continued this now for over a year, is tremendous increases in energy levels, above what I got when I originally started the low carbohydrate living.

Brad Kearns: What do you think that is from that increase in energy levels? Is your brain burning ketones or something?

Steve Levine: Well, I have never have taken it to the point where I am actually examining my level of ketones in my body during the course of the day, but I think it has something to do with what, I think, Mark has talked about before, and that is our natural state over the millions of years, we didn't always have the luxury of having a breakfast. People had to go out hunt and gather and therefore our bodies are sort of adapted to working optimally even in a fasting state. Particularly what I learned, and I think it is true with me, is that its not like my body is hungering for nutrition while I am doing these hikes. As you might have hear, the mitochondria that feeds out cells, that is the spark plug in our cells, that need that energy substance, can take it out of stored body fat. It makes no difference to the mitochondria whether it is eating a cheeseburger that you had a while ago, or whether it is taking it from stored body fat and converting that to energy. It is just a clean form of energy for me.

Brad Kearns: What if someone is not quite there? They can't wait until 1:00 or they finish even a moderate workout and have that appetite going and struggling with weight loss accordingly. What do you suggest they do to get to this point?

Steve Levine: [00:08:22] That is really an important point, Brad, because I had probably a decade, I don't think you need that long, but a decade of having a reduced carbohydrate lifestyle before I even imagined trying this and again, it wasn't until this movement really took off that I really understood that this was something worth trying. There are a couple of things. One, your body will tell you when you are ready and so make sure that you have gone through a phases where you have restricted your carbohydrates and are comfortable becoming a fat-burning machine. And probably the biggest tip I can give, and again, I have Mark talk about it, is that there are various ways to have carbohydrates during the day, but I have just naturally, in the past, and certainly continuing forward now, do what is called intermittent ketosis. Intermittent fasting and intermittent ketosis. So I don't eat until 1:00 normally on days, and then I have eggs with some sharp cheddar cheese, and I have a big-ass salad, so I have some of the non-starchy carbs during the day. But I really don't have any starchy carbs at all until the evening. That really enhances the ketogenic state. You wake up in a ketogenic state having not eaten all night, and then the fasting until 1:00 keeps me in that ketogenic state very strongly and then I continue that on through lunch and with non-starchy carbs. I find doing that for a while, you may find when you wake up in the mornings, it becomes easier and easier to attempt the intermittent fasting.

Brad Kearns: So it sounds like you are satisfying yourself with a delicious meal but you are staying in ketosis because of the fact the carb level in the meal is so low.

Steve Levine: [00:10:07] That's right. It is some of the primal [unintelligible] point that Mark has talked about in the past. Everybody has to tinker with it. Me, personally, when I get later in to the day, I do find that a certain amount of carbohydrate is beneficial for my personal system. You get quite a bit of fiber from the vegetables and I eat a lot of vegetables. I do find some starchy carbohydrates intake at night helps with regularity and just makes me feel more complete. But by holding it off until the evening instead of having that carbohydrate in the morning, I think, makes all the difference in being able to do fasting and being able to stay in that ketogenic state.

Brad Kearns: You brought up a topic in conversation that has a somewhat difference of opinion in the ancestral health community. What is you take on the discussions about safe starches, resistance starches, so forth, and malleable levels of carb intake on the individual?

Steve Levine: [00:11:05] Well, it is interesting that there seems to be more and more of a growing consensus with respect to the grains, particularly the wheats and other grains that have gluten, and the whole concept that I think is going to be a large development over the next decade in the medical field that we, of course, in the community know about: The whole concept of leaky gut and intestinal permeability causing all kinds of problems related to the diseases of civilization. I think it will become more well known and pronounced and if they do, people are going to realize that gluten avoidance is not just for people with celiac disease, or Crone's disease, but all of us to some extent are going to suffer some intestinal permeability by eating glutens. So the concept of safe starches is an interesting one and again, I

think it is an interesting matter of where you are at in your phase. Clearly, when I was trying to lose trying to bit of weight, and I mentioned before, I had lost 20 pounds earlier on, but I should announce now that once I started intermittent fasting and intermittent ketosis, I am now down to about a 45 pound loss from where I started. I am 6 feet tall and am 165 and feel very comfortable with that. Now that I am at a comfortable weight, I think that I can have the added fiber and added benefits of safe starches in the evenings and it works for me.

Brad Kearns: And if you are not at a comfortable weight, if you are back up at 185 thinking you should get down more, how would you adjust your strategy?

Steve Levine: [00:12:35] Of everything that has happened with this lifestyle, I think the most important thing is, if I do need to lose a little bit of weight it really is effortless and I think it is such a dream for so many of us out there to be able to have that kind of control over our bodies. That is exactly what I do. When I find myself creeping up, and I never creep up that high, but if I do find myself creeping up, I just have a nice meal of meat or fish and I love my nuts and my seeds. I just reduce that carbohydrate intake at night and, A. the weights starts coming off again, and B. when you are in that increased level of ketogenic state where it is going on at a higher level because you are not breaking it off every night, your appetite diminishes even further. Again, I have very little appetite. I was going to also mention that when I intermittent fast in the morning, I am now at the point now where I really don't desire to eat in the morning. And that I never thought would be the case. I thought this would always be a sacrifice for this lifestyle but I am now at the point where I don't even desire. When I do need to go on a minimal carbohydrate level, I find the appetite diminishes even more and it is effortless.

Brad Kearns: Well, that would be mind blowing for many hundreds of millions of American to consider for a moment. You are saying that when you restrict your carb intake and getting that sugar out of your bloodstream, that your appetite drops.

Steve Levine: This goes to the science and I am no scientist. Brad mentioned I am sort of an internet geek and do a lot of reading on the subject, and the control of your insulin levels is so magical. Obviously with intermittent fasting and intermittent ketosis, I am keeping that insulin level at a very low trickle throughout the day. As Mark has mentioned, there are benefits to carb refeeding. I actually, my personal preference is, I do a refeed every night so I do more than any in this movement. But the level of the carb refeeding it really does interplay with the appetite and other issues.

Brad Kearns: What kind of carbs are you choosing, preferring when it is time to indulge?

Steve Levine: [00:14:52] Well one of my little treats, my little 80/20 little treats is organic popcorn, which if you remember the old days of the terminology of the glycemic index and the glycemic load, popcorn actually is a low glycemic load food even though it is a starchy carb. I slather it with grass fed butter to slow the absorption. That is one of my main treats.

Brad Kearns: As well as a healthy intake of vegetables and where else are you getting your carbs over the months?

Steve Levine: [00:15:26] Well, actually vegetables ...what I have done that you might want to try with your local Quiznos. Quiznos has a pretty good selection of salad toppings that they put on their sandwiches and they have some salads with different toppings, etc. I just ask for a special deal. I call it the big-ass salad. I should get royalties for that. They actually take one of their biggest bowls and fill it with the mixed greens and fill it will all the vegetables they have there so even when I am at work, without much effort, I bring some fresh broccoli and kale from home and add it to the salad. That is my main source of carbohydrate.

Brad Kearns: So you talked about the benefits of having the low insulin drip, that moderate insulin level regarding your appetite and balancing the appetite hormones and so forth. What about the draw backs for

someone who is trying to lose weight on a restricted calorie diet, the usual approach, but they are still pumping out too much insulin and messing with their hormones and their appetite.

Steve Levine: [00:16:32] That's is something that I have read about and learned about, again, through Mark's Daily Apple. Frankly, I have lived it. We have all lived it. I never really understood it. I remember an article basically going through this. Asking what is the natural state of man? Is it really to have your bagel and orange juice in the morning, have that insulin spike and then the blood levels quickly dropping because the insulin has to take all that carbohydrate that glucose out of the bloodstream very quickly. Your brain sees that drop in glucose levels and worries where is it going to end. It signals the body to eat more, if fact eat more carbohydrate because you are a sugar burner. So a couple of hours later, you have those cravings and you start going through the whole cycle again. I remember that exactly. I remember those cravings and that is why I was so shocked when the intermittent fasting I was able to completely reverse that process.

Brad Kearns: That's great. It seems that to summarize this section, it seems like, if you want to drop excess body fat, it is all about your appetite and the way to manipulate or to curb your appetite is to moderate insulin production, moderate carb intake and thereby optimizing your appetite hormones so you wake up and don't feel like eating. Would that be one of your signals that you are on the right track?

Steve Levine: Absolutely. That is what worked for me.

Brad Kearns: So now we are going to get in to the people who are naysayers about the fasting, worried about some of the drawbacks. I know the sugar burners who try to fast will end up to powerhousing a pint of ice cream that night. Some of the athletic minded people are concerned about possible muscle wasting, muscle cannibalism, muscle glucogenesis happening when the meals aren't on a regular basis. The old body builders theme said you got to eat six small meals a day with egg white and your sliced meats and make sure it is every two hours and so forth.

Steve Levine: [00:18:35] I had similar concerns, Brad, when I first went in to this. I did my own research on this and on Mark's Daily Apple. What I have come to understand, at least the kind of intermittent fasting that I am involved with which is more of a restricted eating window of between 8 or 9 o'clock the night before until 1:00 o'clock the next day. If you are in a fat burning mode, you are not going to get to the stage of being anywhere close of having the body go in to the muscle for glucose. What I didn't understand, and what I have learned more recently is that is a major differentiation between those people that may try intermittent fasting when they are sugar burners. The body running out of glucose and not having glucose come in as expected before you get into a fat adapted stage and you are a sugar burner, there is the distinct concern of muscle cannibalism. I didn't understand that distinction before and it gives me more confidence since I am fat adapted. That is another reason to not even think about trying some of these primal 2.0 approaches. You need to be very sure you are very comfortable and very well adapted to being a fat burner.

Brad Kearns: So back to 1.0 and we deal with this a lot, those of us who are enthusiasts in the primal community, because we want to influence our friends and loved ones and interested people, so to get to that point, you did it it 10 years ago when you started going low carb, mine is more recent. I have been eating this way for six years, cold turkey at the influence of Mark also back in 2008. It sounds like in my case, it was switching out my gigantic bowl of cereal every single morning, that fueled my first few hours of the day, switching it to a big-ass omelet that was very low carb and didn't spike my blood sugar. As the first step, I still had this massive meal every morning but I was on the right track and getting in to that insulin moderating state.

Steve Levine: [00:20:37] I think what you are getting at, Brad, is either if you are thinking about making this transition yourself, or if you are already part of our community and you are trying to explain this to other people, what I find really compelling, and it may not be true in every instance but it has been true in every instance where I have worked with somebody in this area is that people understand the basics of their

cholesterol tests. There's that "bad cholesterol," LDL (which really isn't bad), and there is the good cholesterol HDL. Then there are the triglycerides and they know the basics in that it is the amount of fat that is going in to the bloodstream. And they may have anywhere between 150 to 200 as the number on their tests and they are told that it is normal. But that is a lot. What you can do to try to get them to see the science, the logic, behind this approach, is to go ahead and try the 21-Day Transformation that Mark has put out, or some other type of protocol. Then get your cholesterol retested. I had this happen to me about 10 years ago and I did not attribute it to my diet. I just could not understand that my triglycerides, by going off the heart healthy grains and on to the artery clogging saturated fats, my triglycerides went from 150 to 50. Every friend that I have introduced this concept to has had the same experience. Once they realize that by eating fat, if you are a fat burner, you are then burning that fat and reducing the fat in your bloodstream. That is something that will get people's attention.

Brad Kearns: So that is the Gary Taubes message. One of them in a nutshell is eating fat will not make you fat, it just will be a great source of energy to burn. It is eating those carbs that is what makes you fat and also inhibits your ability burn stored body fat.

Steve Levine: Yes and you do have to caution people that this only works if you are serious about limiting the carbohydrates and they are following these protocols. It does not make any sense to continue in a sugar burning mode and therefore a fat storage mode and that add on top of the sugars and carbohydrates they are eating add additional fat. It doesn't work. They are correct the practitioners. The conventional wisdom is correct to the extent that you live in a less than optimal sugar-burning mode. Then the fat doesn't do you any good. But if you make that transition and you get in to a fat burning mode, that fat is really beneficial to your energy levels and your health.

Brad Kearns: So you are not a big fan of a half-hearted attempt to eat primally and go from the cereal to the omelet but also keep the orange juice and the toast in the background picture.

Steve Levine: [00:23:17] Mark mentions the 80/20 rule and again I obviously live that 80/20 rule to a degree with my popcorn at night, etc., but if you can just adjust what you eat and when you eat it so, again, I cannot stress enough that when you are sleeping at night you are going in to a fasted state, unless you wake up in the middle of the night for ice cream, and so when you wake up in the morning, even the sugar burners out there, you are an inefficient fat burner. Because you haven't adapted yet, but you are burning some fat when you wake up. But you can just keep that going for the morning and have the kind of breakfast that we were talking about...more protein and fat. Just keep it at that level. That is what my daughter does. I have got my daughter to to the point where she will have a breakfast with no carbohydrates and she does what she wants in the afternoon. But she has extended that fat-burning window.

Brad Kearns: So contrary to the conventional wisdom that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, when you are fat adapted, it would be the opposite. It would be an important time to strengthen your ability to be fat and ketone burning.

Steve Levine:[00:24:23] It is funny because I always think about that breakfast being the most important meal of the day and I think it is absolutely true but the key is that breakfast is breaking the fast. And so I have my breakfast at 1:00 p.m. and it is my most important meal of the day. It is my eggs and my sharp cheddar cheese and my big-ass salad.

Brad Kearns: Break fast. That really makes sense. I appreciate your taking us on this journey. It has come along to be a nice show that reaffirms the basic principles of, how important they are and how effective they are. And also a good little primer for someone that is thinking about making that transition or has a little bit of awareness, obviously because they are listening to the podcast, but wants to transition in to better health and easily manage weight and so forth.

Steve Levine: [00:25:11] I guess I'd just like to conclude by saying that I am a little unusual in that I am sort of an internet geek. I really get in to the blogs like Mark's Daily Apple and other blogs. It isn't that

difficult. A lot of these concepts you can get from just some basic information either from Mark's Daily Apple or his book, The Primal Blueprint, or the step-by-step the 21-Day Transformation. But you don't really have to get in to the weeds like I have in some of the discussions tonight to succeed tremendous benefits. I encourage everybody to take it one step at a time but to give it some time. We didn't really talk to much about when you start off with this lifestyle, as you body converts from a sugar burner to a fat burner, there could be a little low carb flu. Don't be discouraged if there is some initial hesitancy as your body makes the transition. It's a good thing. Give it the 21 days that we keep talking about I think you'll find yourself and your friends getting in to this lifestyle more and more.

Brad Kearns: Steve Levine from Auburn, California, thank you so much for joining us on the Primal Blueprint podcast. If you are one of those people where life is really busy and life is passing you by and you haven't quite made the plunge that you envisioned you would, I think you should come to Primalcon and get a total immersion experience with some of the best presenters and talent in the world motivating you and inspiring you along with all the guests. Of courses, Dreams Tulum is coming up March 1 through 6th down in Mexico. We have very few spots left. We are just about to announce by the time this podcast comes out, the first east coast Primalcon in Mohawk, New York, just and hour north of New York City and then our fifth annual Primalcon in the beautiful southern California beach town of Oxnard in and that will be September 25 thru 28th, 2014. Visit PrimalBlueprint.com and you can get more information on those grand events, as well as some other things that we are launching such as Vanessa Lambert's Primal Play Day. It's a single day engagement in Los Angeles, a new product that we are offering now and many other events out there that get you immersed in the primal lifestyle. Thanks for so much for listening. Talk to you next time.