

## **The Primal Blueprint Podcast – Episode #2: The 80/20 Rule with Mark Sisson**

### **Topic: The 80/20 Rule**

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Brad Kearns: Brad Kearns here, your host in studio in Malibu, California, with Mark Sisson. Thanks for being back here. Today, I think we should talk about the 80/20 rule which was one of the principles you laid out in the Primal Blueprint. It really resonated and become a popular discussion topic at your live events, and also possibly a little misunderstood perhaps.

Mark Sisson: [00:00:23] Well, yeah. It is interesting to see what people write about on the internet regarding the use and abuse of the 80/20 rule. Originally the 80/20 rule was there because we had this saying on Mark's Daily Apple, "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of good. You should strive for 100%, and if you ultimately arrive at 80/20 percent, you have succeeded. So don't beat yourself up for those few mistakes you have made just trying to be compliant with all of the things in the Primal Blueprint particularly the Ten Primal Blueprint Laws.

Over time it would appear that the 80/20 rule has been absorbed into the Paleo community as well it's okay that I am Paleo or Primal 80% of the time and not 20% of the time. Then when you look at their food chart they actually are being quite generous and probably only 60% and not 40% of the time. So there's a tremendous amount of leeway with this 80/20 rule but the original intent was to try to be 80% when possible. Try to be as compliant as possible and on those days when you make a mistake or fall off the wagon, just get right back up and get on and as long as in retrospect only 20% are the mistakes you made, then that's going to lead you down the right direction towards better health and fitness.

Brad Kearns: So the big word there is in retrospect because that implies that you weren't shooting for 80%, you were shooting for 100%.[00:01:55]

Mark Sisson: Yes. So when everything's met in the discussion board and forums, that must mean that you are promoting some form of orthoexia if you are telling people to

shoot for 100%. That's a word I have come to kind of dislike, I guess. Orthoexia, this concept that we are too caught up in trying to eat right and therefore we've got our own little form of eating disorder because we are trying too hard to be compliant with a Primal or Paleo eating strategy. But the reality is, that it is important that we seek out the better foods and its important to try to avoid the bad guys. [00:02:51]

The question now is, with all of the research done in the last three or four years, is what are the bad guys? Are they really as bad as we thought they were. Initially when the Primal Blueprint came out I was quite adamant about, and still am, that sugar is not a great thing for you. The less sugar you burn in a lifetime, probably the better off you are.

And the corollary to that is that the more that are able to burn fat on a regular basis the healthier you'll probably be. In the pursuit of that, a lot of discussion has been had about what is the appropriate amount of carbohydrates? When I talk about fat burning beasts and how we can refigure ourselves to derive most of our energy in stored body fat on a daily basis and thats a skill we can all develop. People say, "Well, wait a minute.

Glucose is still an important fuel and the brain still needs some glucose."

That leads in to all these discussions about the idea of safe starches and how much of that is appropriate and how much is the appropriate amount of carbohydrates for the average person? There's a template I have offered that says GENERALLY if you eat less than 150 grams of carbs in a day, you'll be on your way to be a healthier individual and to the extent that you eat more than 150 or, say, 200 grams of carbs a day, you will likely be running a risk that you will gain weight over the years and probably not an inappropriate amount of carbohydrates to take in that's probably a little too much of a glucose load for most people. [00:04:45]

But, and this is something I have started recently in the past couple of years, humans have a tendency to do what they can get away with. And if that means if I can get away with eating more sugar, or more candy, or more starch, and I don't gain weight and I don't seem to be becoming Type II diabetic, then why would I want to deprive myself of these hedonic pleasures? People tend to see what they can get away with. Across the board they tend to see if they can get away with less sleep. Well, I know I need eight hours, Mark, and I read about the idea that we need good sleeping patterns and sleeping habits, but, gee, there was a concert last night. I got back at 1 o'clock. I woke up at 7 this morning, I still feel pretty good. I still think I can get away with that. So the fact you can get away with it, doesn't necessarily mean that it is good for you or that in the long run, it is going to be a good thing. On the other hand, the fact that you can get away with it means that its not manifesting itself in any issues right now. What's the right choice ? And that brings us back to my original premise in the Primal Blueprint. I don't have the answers. I can't tell you what's right or wrong. I can just give you information to educate yourself, to empower yourself to make choices, and when you make those choices, to be able to understand the potential ramifications of those choices. If you make the kind of choices that follow the Primal Blueprint, I can assure you there's a pretty good likelihood that you can achieve the results that you seek. Maybe more so than eating a pizza and drinking a diet coke all day long.

The 80/20 rule kind of opened up this whole discussion of where are the boundaries for people who are trying to be primal, trying to be compliant, and trying to extract the greatest possible life for themselves.

Brad Kearns: You hit that point pretty hard in the seminar, too, about the series of choices. [00:06:55]

One thing that we struggle with is we have these stated goals. I want to drop this ten pounds of body fat. I know how to do it because Mark Sisson told me in his book. But here's the cheesecake platter coming at me and now your choices are getting jumbled up and it's the relative importance of your goals vs. chewing this thing and having it go down and taste good in your mouth.

Mark Sisson: Yeah, and that's what's important. Those are decisions we face every day. The fact that this one piece of cheesecake isn't going to kill me right now and it's not going necessarily derail my plans if I only have a couple of bites of cheesecake now and get back on the program tomorrow. So here's the thing. When we face that cheesecake question, it's probably wise to ask oneself, are the three or four minutes of gustatory pleasure that are provided by this cheesecake worth the several hours of tossing and turning all night because of increased insulin, cortisol, adrenaline response and whatever else is going to happen? Because you have so finely tuned your system right now. And the guilt tomorrow or having had that entire piece of cheesecake, when, in fact, one or two bites might be all you need to satisfy that immediate hedonistic impulse to have the cheesecake. So that you literally can have your cake and eat it too. And that's another skill that we develop within the Primal Blueprint eating strategy. At what point am I no longer hungry for the next bite? So would regard to a piece of chocolate or a piece of cheesecake or whatever, if one or two bites will satisfy that craving, then go for it. Look I do this because I want to enjoy my life. The reason engage in the Primal Blueprint isn't so that I can live the longest possible life and win that contest, it's so that I can enjoy every bite of all the food I eat every moment of every day so that I can spend more time playing, so I exercise in the gym so that I can play uninjured and do better at play. All of these things are contemplated to improve my quality of life on a minute by minute, day by day basis. And included in that concept is that idea that I can have a bite of cheesecake once in a while and have that be all I need.

Brad Kearns; [00:09:27] Have you given us permission of having some level of indulgent treat any time we want?

Mark Sission: That has always been the issue. Its always been the case with the Primal Blueprint. That's an issue with some of the newest and paleo programs out there. If you have one spoonful of sugar or one bit of soybean oil or that dressing that you hadn't read the label on, you lose your paleo card. That is not the case with the Primal Blueprint. We are back to: on balance am I eating in a way that is going to promote the sorts of gene switches that I want to promote? Am I going to build some muscle, burn some fat? Am I going to decrease inflammation? When you look at in terms of 30,000 feet in the big

picture and what is the result of the days worth of choices. On balance, could I advance my goal a little bit toward being that lean, strong, happy, healthy productive human that I want to be. If the answer is yes, on balance I did advance that, then, hey, you win.

Brad Kearns: What if the answer is sixty days from now is EEH, not really... I am still carrying this excess 10 pounds of body fat that I really is harming my enjoyment of life? [00:10:49]

Mark Sisson: The first question I'd ask is that is the 10 pounds of body fat actually harming your enjoyment of life. If it is that important to you then the first thing that I'd do is I'd go back and evaluate where you came from. If you lost 75 pounds to get to the point where you only had 10 more pounds to lose, then I'd say, "Look at the success you've had so far. That's amazing and transformative and if you never did anything else from there except maintain that body weight and continue to eat that way and exercise then you are winning the game of life. You are enjoying life and you are able to maintain that body weight without having to sacrifice a lot more and without having to count calories and go to the next level," then I would ask myself, "Is it worth the sacrifice I might have to make to get that last 10 pounds?" If the answer is yes, it is worth the sacrifice, then we have to look at what it is going to take. Maybe you do have to become that much more that much more diligent and to drop those extra 10 pounds. I wrote a piece a while back on ideal body composition and I want to remind the audience that the ideal body composition isn't what you think because you looked at the cover of Victoria's Secret catalog, or Muscle and Fitness, and said, "I want to look like that." That's not necessarily your ideal body composition. Ideal body composition is where your body says, "Wow! this is phenomenal. You dropped 75 pounds or you dropped 20 pounds. I have more energy. I don't get sick, ever. I maintain this weight with ease and with comfort and with enjoying my life. I have all the energy I need all day long to get through my day." That's what your body says for your ideal body composition. So let's be clear that ideal body composition from the Darwinian genetic point of view. How does this organism maintain homeostasis and become the longest living, most productive, healthiest organism it can be at this particular body weight? Because evolution doesn't really care about the cover of Victoria's Secret magazine.

Brad Kearns: I think that clears up what we started out talking about, the 80/20 rule, and you can sense that confusion with people about what's the right thing to do and even looking, I think, inappropriately, to Mark Sisson for directives and regimented guidelines about what and what not to do. I think it sounds like the picture is clearer now.

Mark Sisson: Well, I hope so. Maybe, I just but the idea is we are back to this experiment of one. I have provided a set of guidelines, that if you follow them generically, generally, you'll trend toward your ideal body composition. At some point, you may want to experiment by throwing in a little bit more resistant starch or

you [unintelligible] once a week or there may be little tweaks you read about on the interweb beyond Mark's Daily Apple that are worth experimenting with. but my goal is for you to have a template to use as a starting point to arrive at a healthier and more productive and enjoyable life for yourself.

Brad Kearns: Thanks a lot, Mark, and for the listeners, too. If you have questions or topics you would like to hear Mark Sisson discuss on the podcast, you can send them to Mark's Daily Apple and we can talk to you next time.