

The Primal Blueprint Podcast – Episode #20: Questions and Answers with Mark Sisson

Topic timestamps:

Stacking the workouts: 00:39

Benefits of fasting in conjunction with exercise: 10:08

Reaching ketosis: 17:17

Developing a reference point: 28:47

Good news/bad news - body masks pain: 29:20

Description:

Mark gets back into the Q&A rhythm with some great commentary on an assortment of questions related to peak performance and Primal living. We begin by reviewing a unique training approach where you “stack” hard workouts on consecutive days, which allows for additional recovery time afterward, and also respects the idea that stress hormones flow for a sustained period of time after challenging workouts. Then, we discuss the importance of maintaining intensity during tapering to preserve blood volume for peak performance events. Mark also examines the dilemma of whether to refuel with carbs after tough workouts or to fast to optimize the flow of adaptive hormones into the bloodstream. This leads to the topic of how you can adopt an intuitive eating and exercise approach, which helps with disciplining for healthy habits. Mark then closes the show with a discussion on how endorphins can have pro and con effects on the body.

Executive Summary:

[00:39] Mark Sisson and Brad Kearns discuss the concept of “stacking” hard workouts on back-to-back days to allow for more recovery afterward and also to align better with the elevated stress hormones and systemic inflammation that occurs when hard workouts are conducted. Brad mentioned when he was a professional triathlete coached by Mark, that the usual pattern of doing a hard run Tuesday, a long ride Friday, a long run on Sunday, etc. started to become stressful because the athletes were always recovering from something and then jumping back into the next hard session (either high intensity or long duration, or both sometimes!)

Mark suggested to Brad and other teammates he was coaching, to try stacking a long, hard run on Tuesday and the very next day do the bike ride in the mountains. It seemed daunting at the time but it worked out very well for the athletes. Mark explains what his thought process was and how it is that the body might benefit from this regimen. When we spaced the workouts, we expected the body to recover in between, but the body never fully recovered. So we tried to stack them and allow three days to recover to allow the hormones to repair the body. Many people report that they feel great the next day after a hard workout, but they should resist pushing themselves in order to allow the body to rest. Training at the elite level is not about how often or how hard you work but how much time you allow for the body to heal. Usually the athletes also experience emotional highs that entice them to push again after a strong performance. If the athlete keeps in mind he/she can look forward to the upcoming rest period after the event, it helps to push him to be strong. It is important to recognize you will get the R&R and resist the temptation to go out and do more. You have to be thoughtful about the objective markers the body is sending regarding heart rate, resting pulse, body weight, how much sleep you got the night before.

What about the average guy? He or she needs to educate themselves about all this, pay attention to his or her body and make the choices that work for them. You don't really need that many breakthrough workouts to get to the next level in order to continuously improve. There have been studies that found, surprisingly, how little training one really needs to maintain 100% of fitness. Even people who travel and have busy lives during the week, could schedule hard workouts on the weekends and consider the weekdays for light short sprints or something in order to stay fit.

[00:10:08] Here is another performance related question written in from Kylie in San Luis Obispo, that asks about the benefits of fasting in conjunction with intense exercise to optimize the flow of the gastric

hormones in the blood stream after workouts. What about recovering from the workouts and refueling?

It is all about a choice to refuel with carbohydrates right after a workout versus not eating after a workout in order to maximize that hormonal input. When you work out every day, or glycolytic activity every day, you should have some carbohydrate intake within the next few hours, in order to replenish glycogen reserves. The window of opportunity is where the body seems to like that immediately post exercise for maximizing glycogen re-synthesis in the muscles. Taking that much carbs tends to spike insulin, and that tends to blunt the growth hormone and the testosterone pulse post workout. It is a choice. It is not right or wrong.

How do you know when to eat? A real indicator is when you are not hungry, you don't need to eat. If you are very hungry immediately after a workout, you may need to check your strategy, it might mean you are not very good at burning fat. You have depleted your glycogen. The brain doesn't know what to do. Primal Blueprint is talking about converting your old carb/sugar burning paradigm into new fat-burning beast paradigm.

[00:17:17] Here is a question from Laura in Canada about reaching ketosis. She eats a lot of vegetables and very little fruit. She wants to lose 5 pounds and wonders if the vegetables are causing her to be stuck at trying to lose this weight. She wonders if she should go a couple of weeks just eating protein and fats.

It might be that a large amount of vegetables could take you out of ketosis. Some people can stay in ketosis taking in 75 or 80 grams of carbs a day. Timing is critical. If you want to staying below total of 30 grams total of carbohydrates a day for 5 or 6 days and see what happens providing you are taking in a sufficient amount of fat and provided you are not overdoing the protein. Watch the protein intake because in a woman if you take in more than 120 grams a day it might raise the insulin. This in turn shuts off the ketosis. Ultimately, you have to watch the caloric intake even though in primal we talk about not counting calories. If you cut back on the total amount of calories you take in, the body has no choice but to go seek those calories from you stored body fat.

There is a tendency to overdo the protein. There is the reality that the body cannot really process more than 30 maybe 35 grams of proteins at any one meal. It is insulin that turns off ketosis.

There is a very important role that your intuition has to do with this lifestyle. Mark wants his educational material to guide others to develop this intuition rather than over thinking. Make a wise choice.

[00:28:47] Developing a reference point is learning to know what it feels like to eliminate some things from you diet like in the 21-Day plan. Without this awareness, you will not know what effect these toxins have on your body.

[00:29:20] What is the good news/bad news of any primal/paleo eating strategy? The good news is you clean yourself up, and you start to notice the positive changes. When you go back to the way you used to eat, you will notice amazing and sometimes painful changes. The body tends to want to mask the pain and discomfort it experiences so sometimes we are not aware of damage we are doing to ourselves. So when you clean yourself up and begin living healthier, the body regains its ability to signal damage so when you do take in something as a treat, you will feel the signal more intensely.

[00:32:24] Training hard in chronic cardio creates an endorphin rush that is a high similar to a heroin high. It is a biochemical signal that dulls the pain. That is an example of the body doing whatever it can to mask the pain. We need the endorphin rush to help us keep going and perform great feats. Without the endorphin rush, primal man running from a lion might otherwise get tired and feel like napping...However, the endorphin rush can also get us into trouble, with overtraining and chronic exercise patterns. Exercise gives us a natural high, but we must temper this pursuit of a chemical high with intuition and common sense; for many enthusiastic athletes this means resting when they really ought to. Or, referencing back to the start of the podcast, if you stack workouts and get a sustained stress response and chemical high for a couple/few days, you can wind everything down for the next several days and facilitate proper recovery.