



A Conversation with Caroline Fausel

*Author of *Prep, Cook, Freeze**

Blogger at Olive You Whole

Q. You're the blogger behind Olive You Whole and author of the new cookbook, *Prep, Cook, Freeze*, both of which share and focus on Paleo-friendly recipes. What piqued your interest in the Paleo diet? How did you find yourself starting a food blog where you develop and share Paleo recipes?

A. So it's funny because looking back over the course of my entire life, I've always been on a path of finding what's healthiest for me. Health has always been a motivator of mine. My first bout of vegetarianism was in elementary school. If you can believe it, my best friend was vegetarian, and I spent so much time at her house and with her family that I decided I'd be vegetarian, too! That's the first time I can really remember thinking about what I was eating.

And then my husband and I—well, boyfriend and I at the time—were vegetarian for most of college. We were vegetarian, pretty much near vegan, for about five years. But what really brought about the Paleo diet and that change was when we got pregnant with my daughter, Ella, very quickly after getting married. So Ella is really the answer to why we switched. She's eight now.

When Ella started to eat solids, I had this realization that what I feed myself is one thing, but I now have a responsibility to give her all the nutrients that her body needs to grow and thrive, and that was especially important because she was born prematurely. She was born at 30 weeks instead of 40. I was 23 when I had her—I was a baby myself, or at least I felt like it at the time—so really, it was Ella. I went back into all the nutrition science because I really wanted to set her up for the most optimal future, and we stumbled upon the Paleo diet in my research, and it's just been forward ever since then.

Q. Why do you believe so strongly in the Paleo diet? What benefits have you and your family experienced from following that lifestyle?

A. I will say, we went from being vegan one day to starting a Paleo-style diet the next. And it was terrible at first. I really didn't like meat, and it's hard to remove things from your diet without replacing them. It was a really steep learning curve, but after that first month, I can't even overstate how much better we felt. I lost a ton of weight that I didn't even know was possible to lose, my skin was clearer, and my digestion was better than it had ever been.

Before Paleo, I didn't realize how good I could feel, which you'll hear many people say after removing things from their diet or trying new ways of eating. We were so grain-heavy and legume-heavy, being vegetarians, and it just wasn't working for my body personally. Once we switched to the Paleo diet and were eating meats, fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats, I had a level of energy that I didn't think possible, and I'm a very energetic person in general. We felt so much better.

And from a nutrition science standpoint, if you want to get all of your nutrients from food, meat is crucial to that. I didn't want to be supplementing my newborn; I wanted us to be able to get everything we needed for our bodies just by what we were eating. And now, we are more flexible. I don't believe in the Paleo diet so strongly that there are no exceptions.

My goal with what I'm creating and putting into the world is to provide recipes that are accessible for everyone. Whether you have Celiac disease, or you're gluten-free, or you're dairy-free, or you have diabetes and can't have sugar, creating Paleo recipes makes them accessible for so many different kinds of people with food intolerances or autoimmune diseases.

I do think the ultimate goal from a diet standpoint—whether it's Paleo or not—is to have the most diverse diet that you can.

Q. Talk to me about the importance of nutrient and vitamin-rich foods and making an effort to incorporate those foods into our diets, whether or not someone is fully committed to a Paleo, Keto, vegan, vegetarian, etc. lifestyle or not.

A. I feel less these days that it's subtracting things—certain foods—from our diets, and more that it's adding things. I want to prioritize a healthy protein on my kid's plate and a healthy fat, and I want those greens and complex carbohydrates. I want these things on their plates, and that's important to me. But I think when you start there, you can add the dinner roll. You can add whatever if that still makes you feel great. To me, it's about how you feel, so you can add those things.

But when every meal of the day is a bagel and cream cheese or pasta... When you start with those things that potentially make you not feel your best, then you're likely not going to also add kale. So I feel like the important thing is to start with what's necessary, and then sure, add in whatever you're feeling like. But when you start with the basic, important things, then you feel confident that you're filling your diet with those important, necessary nutrients.

Q. In addition to clean eating via Paleo, you're also passionate about clean living. When we use the term "clean living," what does that mean to you, what kind of clean living content do you provide on your blog, and why are you passionate about it?

To me, I've always said I want to live a life that's clean, inside and out. That means a lot of things to me, and clearly, up until this point, a lot of my content has really been food-focused. And so it just makes sense to me that if we're really focused on what we're putting inside our body and that those things are beneficial to our body, the same should be true for what we put *on* our body, specifically what we put on our skin in the products that we use.

But then it also goes above and beyond that to what's in our homes, what's in the products that we're using to clean, and are they toxic or are they healthy. We typically think of "healthy" as what we're eating, but to me, that word means "does it promote health in our lives?" So you can have an unhealthy countertop spray or the foundation that you're putting on your face in the morning. What I want everything in my life to do - and I'm not perfect at it, but it's what I'm striving for - is to help promote the healthy life that I'm creating, not harm it. And the way that these unhealthy products can harm your body is through endocrine disruption. Some products can literally change the levels of hormones in your body. You can have an allergic response. They can cause cancer. So all these things are not ideal.

So to me, clean living is about the whole picture. It's not just what you're putting in your body, and it's not just what you're putting on your body or in your home. It's really making healthy choices in every area of your life.

Q. You're about to release your first cookbook, *Prep, Cook, Freeze: A Paleo Meal Planning Cookbook*. First of all—congratulations!—and second, tell me about the problem this cookbook is solving for families. Why a meal prep cookbook?

A. For seven years, I've created recipes, one after another. But I've felt so strongly that the feedback I was getting from my audience was like "Yeah, I can go to Pinterest" or "Yeah, I can go to your blog, and I could find recipes, but what I need is a way to revolutionize our weeknights so we're not spending an hour and a half in the kitchen and I'm spending time with my family." So that's when I sought to create *Prep, Cook, Freeze*.

Prep, Cook, Freeze was born out of how I cook for my own family. When I started to write it, I had never really found a method that worked for us, so I came to this point, right before COVID, where I was determined that since I had the skill set, I just needed to make my own method. So I started tinkering around even before the cookbook deal came about, with how I could combine batch cooking—making a ton of food at once because I love doing that—make a ton of food, freeze half of it, and then you have it later. But what I found is that freezing food can really suck sometimes, and it's disgusting. You reheat it, and it's a soupy mess, and it's gross. So I wanted to figure out a way to make this work.

So with *Prep, Cook, Freeze*, you're prepping in an afternoon, and you're freezing an element of every meal, but what I really changed about freezer meals was that you're freezing an element—not the entire meal—and then bringing in fresh ingredients on cook night. So you still have that salad, you have that freshly prepared side dish, you have the cilantro on top and fresh ingredients. None of the meals in *Prep, Cook, Freeze* feel like your grandmama's freezer meals. We've really freshened it up, which I love.

Q. A lot of people out there are wary of leftovers. How does your method keep things fresh and avoid meal repetition/fatigue?

A. For my family, what I used to do was batch cook the heck out of some chili, and we ate it for three or four nights in a row. I used to get mad at my mom for doing that, and then here I was doing it! The reason I love *Prep, Cook, Freeze* is that you're making enough food for two weeks, but you're not eating chili for five nights in a row. You're going to eat it Monday, then you're going to put it in the freezer, and you can either make the entire week the following week, or you can make it three

months from now, or you can go back to the chili recipe in the cookbook and follow the directions for reheat nights. So it's not repetition—I mean, sure you had it two months ago, but it's not like, "Hey babe, you had this last night." You're at least going to be a week out from eating it again, which I love. It's so nice to just pull something out of the freezer.

Q. As a busy mom of two, how has the *Prep, Cook, Freeze* method benefited you and your family?

A. My husband will help me during prep day, and we had close to 30 recipe testers who said the same thing. It's actually so fun because we grocery shop together, and we prep together. It's a fun thing that brings us together over a few hours on a weekend, and then what it provides during the week is not even about food.

What it provides to me during the week is more time to do the family thing. I find I'm more committed to our nightly devotionals together, and praying together, and doing the full bedtime routine that we know will set the kids up for success. We're getting to do game night, whereas we would normally be doing dishes. So it's just a trade-off of time.

And then additionally, I think when you are doing prep day in one day, what happens is that you've got a lot of cooking and a lot of cleaning, but then during the week, it's awesome. You're like, "Oh, I just chopped cilantro, and all I have to rinse off is this knife and this cutting board." You know? There's significantly less work during the weeknights.

My goal for each recipe in the cookbook was to bring it all together on cook nights. It should only take 15 minutes or less of hands-on time. So it really just is whipping it together.

Q. When a lot of people think of freezer meals, they think of slow cookers. Is that a component you use or is it more active prep during cook time?

A. The way that it shook out, you're making a lot of the meat components on prep day and then freezing half of that and putting the other half in the fridge. And on cook nights, it's a lot of the fresh ingredients.

So, it's like, heat the fajita meat on the stove on your cast iron skillet, and then go ahead and chop up your pico de gallo, your cilantro, your onions, and then put them in the taco.

We prioritize the Instant Pot because it's so quick—you cook chicken in 10 minutes instead of 8 hours in the slow cooker—so we use a lot of the Instant Pot, but then give alternative instructions if you need to do the stovetop or oven or whatever. But really, your cook night is just to bring it together. It's really just the chopping of fresh ingredients and the plating, bringing it all together.

Q. If you had to pick just one, which recipe from *Prep, Cook, Freeze* would you say is your go-to or favorite?

A. What if I can't?! Well, let me just say this. I have worked on a Paleo pizza crust for seven years, and my poor family has had to suffer through all of the mishaps, and it's just not right. You know when there's just a bunch of eggs in it, and you're like, "Why does this just have eggs and almond flour?"

And so—there is a Paleo pizza, it's actually a barbecue chicken pizza, in the cookbook. And that pizza crust, I mean, it is worth the whole cookbook. Because not only is it Paleo, but it's also nut-free, it's also egg-free, *and* it's yeasted. I have scoured the Internet and I actually don't think this creation exists otherwise. I'm super proud of it; it's brought back pizza night for our family. The dough is wonderful and it can also be used for buns and all sorts of things.

But yeah, that barbecue pizza - I dream about that pizza!

Q. And what about your kids? Do they have a favorite?

A. You know, there are some nachos in the cookbook that are to die for, and they love those carnitas. And then, surprisingly, there's a Thai basil beef recipe that doesn't sound super kid-friendly, but it's so, so easy, and they absolutely devour it.

Q. What are some of the resources you've included in the cookbook to help simplify weeknights even more through the *Prep, Cook, Freeze* method?

A. When we started out on the cookbook, every single recipe was completely homemade, as it traditionally is. But the feedback we got from our testers was that it took too much time. So we went back to the drawing board, and as many times as we could throughout the cookbook, we'd replace our homemade sauce with a Paleo-friendly pre-made alternative. So those pre-made sauces are what we include in the *Prep, Cook, Freeze* instructions. And then in the back of the book, we provide the recipes for our homemade version, so if you have more time that week or you really want to try our recipe, you have that option as well. Honestly, it was kind of against my pride, but people have been so excited to hear that they can do minimal prep, use a pre-made sauce, and be ready to go.

The two sections in the back of the cookbook - that are super helpful - are a list of some Paleo brands that you can use in our recipes, and additionally, the homemade versions of those sauces, pizza crusts, pastas - all those kinds of things. So we have the pre-made, this-is-going-to-make-your-life-easier option, and then we have the homemade option for when you have more time.

And then, week-by-week, we include a grocery list for every single thing you're going to need that week, and then there's also a grocery list for what we call "reheat week." But even if you just want to make the pizza again, you turn there and you're like, "Oh, I'm going to need red onion, cilantro, and pineapple and I'll be good to go." So we provide the grocery lists for what you'll need that first week, what you'll need for reheat week, and then the individual recipes where you can see what you need for those as well.

Q. Who might specifically benefit from this meal prep method, in addition to your run-of-the-mill busy family?

A. This method is a really great solution for pregnant mamas. They can prep ahead of time and have all of these really great meals in their freezers and then give the grocery list to their spouse for when they need to pull things out. So this is really a great solution for pregnant mamas who want to have some nourishing meals prepped and on-hand for when the baby comes.

Q. Let's say someone has been considering making a diet switch, and Paleo sounds like it could be a good fit but they're intimidated to jump in, what would be your advice to them for wading into the world of Paleo?

A. I think my advice would be, "Why not try it?"

While there is a learning curve, you start to make the same swaps and same choices over and over. So once you find the swaps that work for you, you keep that trajectory going, and you start making more and more swaps. So once you find the coffee creamer that you like, you've figured that out and can move on to finding the pasta you like best. So you keep making swaps.

I think the most impactful switch would be to go cold turkey, but I do think there's also value, if that feels overwhelming to you, to cut one thing out and see how that works. So cut gluten out and see how that goes, and then try dairy. There are a bunch of different ways to come at it, especially if you're coming from a standard American diet, and you can wade in by removing one thing at a time to make it a little less overwhelming.

Q. As far as Olive You Whole, what do you have in the works? What are your hopes for the future?

A. I'm going to launch a podcast in January, the Olive You Whole podcast. My hope for the podcast is that food becomes just one of our topics of interest and that we really move into that concept of making healthy, intentional choices in every single area of our lives. So I'm excited to chat about what my husband and I have been learning together over the last 12 years about making intentional choices, what that looks like in our home life, what it looks like with our children and parenting styles, what it looks like with the food choices that we're making, how we're saving our planet from disaster, etc. I'm thrilled to launch a new format, and I think chatting will be so great. I'll be sharing with the audience some things I've learned on solo episodes, and then I'll be bringing in some experts to chat about all of those areas as well, so I'm really excited about that.

I also have plans to write a nonfiction book in the same vein as the podcast. I'm just so passionate about living intentionally and making an impact and living on purpose, so I'll start with the podcast and will then hopefully be writing a book quickly after, as well.

Q. As a blogger, and now an author, and soon-to-be podcaster, why do you do what you do? What gets you excited to wake up and go to work in the morning?

A. Man, I think that I have always been a sharer. Even before I had a blog, I was that person you came to when you were looking for an eco-friendly dress. I've just always been that person—even before I had a blog or influence. I'm so passionate about what I do because I have found solutions that work for my life, whether it is what we're eating or just feeling fulfilled, or living on purpose and living with passion, so I just have always wanted to share—'I found this thing, and I need you to know too!'

So that's what gets me excited about doing what I do, and then I think what helps me continue to do that is the outpouring of love from the community and hearing feedback. When people come to me and say, "Caroline, I did this! I switched to a Paleo diet based on your recommendation, and I can walk again without pain," or, "My baby is able to do this now and couldn't before." Hearing, feeling,

and knowing that what I'm sharing is impacting people's lives for the better; that's what keeps me doing it.