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Cavemen's diet really did just consist of eating meat, researchers claim



Jeff Parsons

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A current trend in health and fitness circles at the moment is to follow the 'Paleolithic diet' also known as the paleo diet or just caveman diet.

It involves eating lots of lean meat and fish as well as lovely nutritious fruits and vegetables.

However, new research has shown that actual cavemen ate meat and pretty much nothing else. Researchers analysed teeth left over from our ancestors and found out that they liked to snack out on things like reindeer and horse. And that's about it. There were some occasional plants, of course. But mostly just other animals.

Researchers described their eating habits as a 'very monotonous diet.'

The question of what Neanderthals ate has been the subject of debate among scientists.



Neanderthals pretty much just ate meat (Getty)

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Neanderthals falling in the range of modern humans, they wondered whether it was a sign of eating fish regularly.

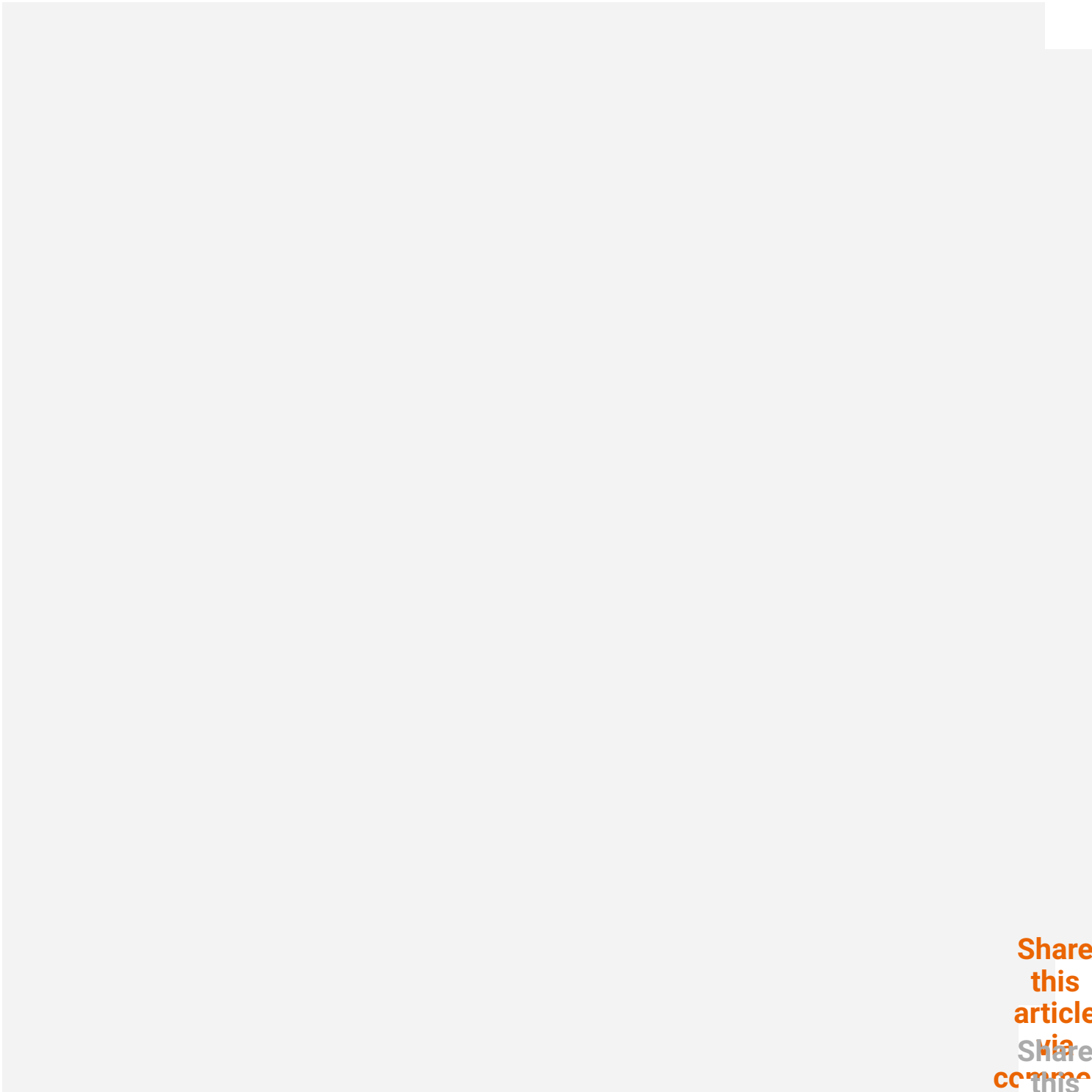
The Neanderthals come from Les Cottés and Grotte du Renne, in France, two sites where no fish remains have been found. But the measurements were performed on a tooth root, which recorded the diet between four to eight years of the individual's life, and on a bone of a one-year-old baby.

To explain the exceptionally high nitrogen isotope ratios, Dr Jaouen and her colleagues decided to use a new isotope technique. She explained that compound-specific isotope analyses (CSIA) allow to separately analyse the amino acids contained in the collagen. Some of the amino acid isotope compositions are influenced by environmental factors and the isotope ratios of the food eaten. Other amino acid isotope ratios are in addition influenced by the trophic level.

The combination of the amino acid isotope ratios allows scientists to decipher the contribution of the environment and the trophic level to the final isotope composition of the collagen.

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Our ancestors weren't that big on vegetables, according to science (Getty)

Study first author Dr Jaouen said: 'Using this technique, we discovered that the Neanderthal of La Vache Cottés had a purely terrestrial carnivore diet. She was not a late weaned child or a regular fish eater, and her people seem to have mostly hunted reindeers and horses.'

'We also confirmed that the Grotte du Renne Neandertal was a breastfeeding baby whose mother was a meat eater.'



Dr Michael Richards, of the Simon Fraser University in Canada, said: 'Previous isotope results indicated a primarily carnivorous diet for Neanderthals, which matches the extensive archaeological record of animal remains found and deposited by Neanderthals.

'There has recently been some frankly bizarre interpretations of the bulk isotope data ranging from Neanderthals primarily subsisting on aquatic plants to eating each other, both in direct contrast to the archaeological evidence.

Professor Jean-Jacques Hublin, director of the Department of Human Evolution at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, said: 'This study confirms that when Homo sapiens arrived in Europe and met Neanderthals, they were in direct competition for the exploitation of large mammals.'

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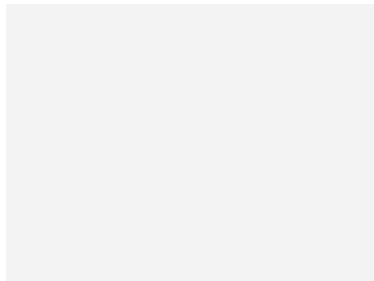
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