

Vegetarian Neanderthals? Turns out they weren't all meat eaters

Neanderthals living in prehistoric Belgium enjoyed their meat – but the Neanderthals who lived in what is now northern Spain seem to have survived on an almost exclusively vegetarian diet.

This is according to new DNA analysis that also suggests sick Neanderthals could self-medicate with naturally occurring painkillers and antibiotics, and that they shared mouth microbiomes with humans – perhaps exchanged by kissing.

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[Laura Weyrich](#) at the University of Adelaide, Australia, and her colleagues have shown that dental calculus carries ancient DNA that can reveal both what Neanderthals ate and which bacteria lived in their mouths.

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The results suggested that the Spy Neanderthal in Belgium often dined on woolly rhinoceros, sheep and mushrooms – but no plants. The El Sidrón Neanderthals in Spain ate more meagre fare: moss, bark and mushrooms – and, apparently, no meat.

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One of the two El Sidrón individuals...is known to have had a large dental abscess. The new DNA analysis shows he had a diarrhoea-causing gut parasite in his system, too...[However,] there was DNA from *Penicillium* fungus – the source of penicillin – in his dental calculus [as well, but] it is difficult to say for sure whether Neanderthals actively consumed the fungus for its medicinal properties.

[The study can be found [here](#).]

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [Neanderthals may have medicated with penicillin and painkillers](#)