

Recommended Reading

We have chosen a smattering of books to briefly review here. There will always be some disagreement between the various authors (and occasionally they even disagree with *us*), but that shows the degree of uncertainty existing in this field. Stay flexible and keep reading. You will be constantly fine-tuning your own rules, but the most important principle will keep floating to the top: good food is great medicine.

Food Rules

An Eater's Manual

(Michael Pollan © 2009)

If you only have time to read one book on this reading list, make it *Food Rules*. Actually, it is so short that you can easily read it at one sitting, which is a good thing because it is hard to put down. In the introduction, Pollan points out two things he has learned in his search for the answer to a simple question: “What should I eat?”

The first thing he found out is that eating has gotten needlessly complicated. However: “The deeper I delved into the confused and confusing thicket of nutritional science, sorting through the long-running fats versus carbs wars, the fiber skirmishes and the raging dietary supplement debates, the simpler the picture gradually became.”

The picture focused on two undisputed facts: first, populations that eat a so-called Western diet (more processed foods and meat, less whole foods and vegetables, lots of added fat and sugar) have high rates of the so-called Western diseases – obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. And fact two – populations that eat traditional diets with more minimally processed food generally don't suffer from these chronic diseases. As Pollan observes, “what an extraordinary achievement for a civilization to have developed the one diet that reliably makes its

people sick!” He then points out a very important third fact that flows from the other two – people who get off the Western diet see dramatic improvements in their health. “I realized that the answer to the supposedly incredibly complicated question of what we should eat ... could be boiled down to just seven words: Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.”

Pollan then unpacks those seven words into sixty-four simple rules: “It's not food if it arrived through the window of your car.” “Treat treats as treats.” “Don't get fuel from the same place your car does.” (We especially liked his mention of the Dutch proverb, “A land with a lot of herring can get along with few doctors.”)

In Defense of Food

An Eater's Manifesto

(Michael Pollan © 2008)

In Defense of Food is the much longer (but just as enjoyable) precursor to *Food Rules*. We don't always agree with his take on the social/political aspects of food production, but we have come to the same conclusions about what to eat and why. The blend of common sense and humor delivered by such a superb writer is particularly refreshing.

The Mediterranean Diet Cookbook

(Nancy Harmon Jenkins © 2009)

One of the best reasons to buy this book (or check it out from the library) is the 7-page examination of the Mediterranean diet on page 467 by Antonia Trichopoulou, M.D. and Dimitrios Trichopoulos, M.D., Professor of Cancer Prevention and Epidemiology at the Harvard School of Public Health. Their analysis combined with Nancy Jenkins's introduction and first two chapters make up a perfect little primer on the Mediterranean diet. Jenkins' Mediterranean credentials are solid – she lived there for a long time and can talk about the food and lifestyle (and the neighbors with the Lamborghini tractor) from the inside looking out. Her authenticity will be refreshing to any serious Mediterraneanophile.

Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy The Harvard Medical School Guide to Healthy Eating

(Walter C. Willett, MD © 2001)

An enjoyable read (Willett is a good writer) and a valuable source of information on the science and common sense of eating well. The book lays out the evidence and conclusions for healthy eating and includes a large section on “the practical translation of nutritional science to food selection and preparation.” His chapter on calcium is worth the price of the book.

Eat, Drink, and Weigh Less (Mollie Katzen and Walter Willett, MD © 2006)

The author of *Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy* has collaborated with the author of *Moosewood Cookbook* (and many other cookbooks) to remind us that sensible eating and weight loss don't have to mean avoiding fat and feeling deprived. However (*sigh*), Mollie Katzen's recipes are disappointingly stingy with good fat, and the authors seem to be too forgiving of heavily processed breakfast cereals, sugary granola-type bars, and fat-free/high-sugar yogurt. Except for these puzzling endorsements in the Shopping Guide, most of the book is helpful.

Passionate Vegetarian (Crescent Dragonwagon © 2002)

Whether or not you are vegetarian – and we are not – Crescent Dragonwagon is a woman we could all use in our kitchens. As well as having a name that is fun to say, she is practical and entertaining. There are more than 1,000 exuberant pages of recipes and food-talk to inspire even reluctant cooks.

The New American Plate Cookbook (American Institute for Cancer Research © 2005)

This book is the work of a team of cooks, writers, and scientists working with the American Institute for Cancer Research

(AICR). Their mission was to produce a cookbook that would “satisfy your conscience while it dazzles your palate”, and at the same time helping to reduce our risk of serious health problems like cancer and heart disease as well as maintain a healthy weight. The photographs are glorious.

The Schwarzbein Principle: The Truth About Losing Weight, Being Healthy and Feeling Younger (Diana Schwarzbein M.D. and Nancy Deville © 1999)

This is an excellent book to acquaint the reader with the concept of using a whole foods diet to minimize insulin resistance, a metabolic problem that is related to the majority of cases of obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and some cancers.

On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen (Harold McGee © 2004)

One of the best books on food ever written. The author is fascinating, too. Enthralled by chemistry and physics growing up, he decided to study astronomy, and then switched to English literature. He wrote the first edition of this book in 1984, but says, “A lot has changed in twenty years! It turned out that *On Food and Cooking* was riding a rising wave of general interest in food, a wave that grew and grew, and knocked down the barriers between science and cooking, especially in the last decade.”

What to Eat (Marion Nestle © 2006)

Marion Nestle is one of the greats of contemporary academic nutrition but she is also a food lover and consumer. These aspects come together well in this easily-read yet powerful book which takes you on a tour of a North American supermarket. In each section there is a discussion of the food's origin, what has gone on during its production

to affect the food, and her recommendations for the consumer.

The breadth of material she covers is vast; production methods, historical comparisons, political and environmental controversies, federal government and special interest group influences, and practical applications of nutrition research are all blended into a very useful set of realistic and humbly presented recommendations. The assumptions and thought processes she uses are laid out clearly to help the reader see whether her conclusion is something they can share. Often her conclusions are amusingly simple: “Milk is just a food. There is nothing special about it. Cow’s milk is not necessary and it is not perfect (at least not for humans). But cow’s milk is also not a poison.”

We do not always share her concerns or solutions. A couple of areas of disagreement would be her position on saturated fats, and her “Taking Action” conclusions that seem to encourage the imposition of centralized controls over which foods the consumer can buy. However, excellent tools are given to allow the consumer to practice personal responsibility and take control of their own food environment, and the disagreements we may have are far outweighed by the rich store of practical knowledge you will gain from reading this book.

Eating Well Magazine

This is a self-described “intelligent magazine bringing together food and health.” It does a decent job of presenting evidence-based information, but mixed with enough puzzling dietary recommendations to give the reader a confusing picture. We are still hoping they will wake up to the serious problem of sugar in the diet (the *Hot Fudge Pudding Cake* recipe from one of their “weight loss experts” says it all) and stop tip-toeing around the good-fat-versus-low-fat issue. Enjoy this magazine, but with a healthy serving of discernment.

www.eatingwell.com

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In the interests of open-minded and healthy intellectual hiking, we are also including books that test confrontational waters on some of the controversial nutritional issues.

The Fat Fallacy: The French Diet Secrets to Weight Loss

(William Clower, Ph.D. © 2003)

A lively, funny, well-written book contrasting the French disregard for fat and carbohydrate restrictions with the American obsession with low-fat dogma. The author points out the much higher rate of obesity and heart disease in this country, and tries to show how the prudent use of chocolate, butter, eggs, and cheese can help us lose weight and gain health.

French Women Don’t Get Fat

(Mireille Guiliano © 2005)

Yet it was precisely the experience of getting fat, albeit as an exchange student in the U.S. that inspired the author – who is French – to write this book! Regardless of the accuracy of the title, the book is full of practical advice, real-life case histories, and recipes. She says the book is for women who need to lose up to thirty pounds, but anyone would benefit from her message.

Nourishing Traditions

The Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats (Sally Fallon, Mary G. Enig Ph.D. © 2001)

This book delivers *exactly* what the title promises, and does so with the efficiency of a machine gun and the firmness of an Italian grandmother. It is an encyclopedic blend of old-fashioned liver-and-onions and Adele Davis at her most radical. Each page is crowded with recipes as well as often-fascinating facts on diet, history, religion, sociology, and medicine. This is a book to read on a desert island even if you disagree with something on every page. It may also be the only place you’ll find a recipe for *Brain Omelet* when you need one.