

Recommended Reading

Here is a smattering of books which we've briefly reviewed. The various authors don't necessarily agree with each other (or us) but that helps remind us that there is plenty of uncertainty in the field of nutrition science. 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*. The 2013 edition (*Food Rules: Illustrated Edition*) added 19 rules to the original 64, but both are short enough to easily read at one sitting – which you probably will. In his search for the answer to a simple question: “What should I eat?” Pollan concludes that eating has gotten needlessly complicated. “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.” Two undisputed facts emerged: 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 64 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 (Michael Pollan © 2008)

In Defense of Food is the much longer (but just as enjoyable) precursor to *Food Rules*, and with the same refreshing blend of common sense and humor. 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.

Real Food (Nina Planck © 2006)

This is an engaging personal story interwoven with a well-reasoned argument against fear of real foods like butter, eggs, cheese, and red meat. Nina is a food writer and activist who grew up on a farm in Virginia with parents who left a comfortable urban life to learn vegetable farming on sixty acres, and who were passionate about self-reliance and whole food. When she left home for college in 1989 she adopted the fat-phobic vegetarian culture of that era, and it wasn't until she opened London's first farmers' market ten years later (yes, her resume makes interesting reading) that she rediscovered the real foods of her childhood. “My own farmers' markets rescued me. . . Overnight I stopped using the supermarket, except for things like olive oil, chick peas, and chocolate. . . Without really trying, I stopped thinking about food and started tasting it.” She lost weight, stopped getting colds and flu, and started researching food and writing books. We're glad she did!

**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' introduction and first two chapters make up a perfect little primer on the Mediterranean diet. Her credentials are solid – she's lived in Spain, Greece, North Africa, France, Lebanon, Cyprus, and Italy, and can talk about the food and lifestyle (and the neighbors in Tuscany with the Lamborghini tractor) from the inside looking out. Her authenticity is refreshing, and gives us a fascinating education in regional Mediterranean cooking. She points out that the food of the Mediterranean is both familiar and easy to prepare. "Because Mediterranean cooking is, by and large, home cooking and not restaurant cuisine, it is improvisational and very forgiving." She also talks about the different cultural attitude toward food and eating; "Mediterranean people are on the whole conscious of food in a way that most people, certainly most Americans, are not... there's a real sense of eating as a social act, a way of communicating, of expressing solidarity and relationship." The recipes in the book range all over the Mediterranean, and the reader will want to make use of Ms. Jenkins' *Mediterranean Methods, Materials, and Ingredients*.

**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 low-fat obsession. The author points out the much higher rate of obesity and heart disease in this country, and tries to show that the prudent use of chocolate, butter, eggs, and cheese can help us lose weight and gain health.

**What to Eat
(Marion Nestle © 2006)**

Marion Nestle is one of the greats of contemporary academic nutrition and she also loves food. Both sides blend nicely in this book, which takes you on a tour of a North American supermarket. In each section she discusses the food's origin, what has gone on during its production to affect the food, and her suggestions for the consumer. She covers a vast amount of material, and blends practical applications of nutrition research into a useful set of realistic recommendations. She also clearly lays out her assumptions and thought processes 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 don't always share her concerns or solutions. A couple of areas of disagreement would be her position on saturated fats, and her conclusions that seem to encourage the imposition of centralized controls over which foods the consumer can buy. However, she offers excellent tools to help the consumer take control of their own food environment, and the disagreements we may have are far outweighed by the practical knowledge you will gain from reading this book.

**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 with the efficiency of a machine gun and the firmness of an Italian grandmother. It is an encyclopedic mix of old-fashioned liver-and-onions and Adele Davis at her most radical. Each page is crowded with recipes and often-fascinating facts on diet, history, religion, sociology, and medicine. You may disagree with something on every page, but it may be one of the few places you'll find a recipe for *Brain Omelet* when you need one.

Good Calories, Bad Calories

(Gary Taubes © 2008)

The low-fat-is-better dietary hypothesis has dominated the health care community for at least 40 years, and Gary Taubes does an excellent job of summarizing the historical debate. He takes us back through a hundred years of human studies, reviews competing hypotheses on how and why we get fat, and offers practical solutions. He points out a century of research suggesting that higher protein and fat diets have a better success rate for treating obesity in free-living people than other approaches. Taubes also reminds us of an equally important piece of evidence about weight loss: the more dieters restrict sugars and starches the more successful they will be. In his *Epilogue* he sums up the current state of research: dietary fat from traditional sources is *not* the cause of disease, and obesity (in most cases) is *not* a simple problem of overeating or sedentary behavior, but a more complex result of hormonal disequilibrium most often the result of excess sugars and starches. Yay! Another conviction against the *real* culprits!

Why We Get Fat

(Gary Taubes © 2011)

This more recent book by Taubes is a briefer treatment – although just as hard-hitting – of the nutritional controversy surrounding obesity. There is a superb overview of the bad science which has dominated the debate and the good science that has been ignored.

Fat Chance

(Robert H. Lustig, M.D. © 2013)

Dr. Lustig is a pediatric endocrinologist who has spent much of his career researching obesity, particularly childhood obesity.

However, he has also become known for a lecture posted on YouTube called *Sugar: The Bitter Truth*. (When interviewed about it, he says he would prefer to be known as the anti-processed food guy, not the anti-sugar guy, and points out that when countries replace traditional diets with processed food, they get sick.) In *Fat Chance* he gives a fascinating

overview of the hormonal and biochemical pathways contributing to obesity, and points to the fallacy of the low-fat-is-good paradigm and the various embedded interests that help sustain it. He outlines the evidence-based case for reducing or eliminating starches and refined sugars – particularly fructose – if we are to gain control over the obesity and diabetes epidemics. He also addresses the importance of real food, fat, fiber, and exercise, and offers practical suggestions for making changes. His review of the harm inflicted by government policies is sobering.

The America's Test Kitchen Cooking School Cookbook (Editors at America's Test Kitchen © 2013)

This book has a long title, but it's a BIG BOOK! At a time when cookbooks are being pushed more and more towards irrelevance by mouse-driven search engines, here is one worth buying. It even deserves its own place on your kitchen counter. (At over six pounds, it's not that easy to move.) This is a how-to book that every beginner cook needs, and any experienced cook can learn from. The first 50 pages, *Cooking Basics*, may be worth the price of the book, which also includes 2,500 photos and 600 recipes. Mind you, the man behind this book, Christopher Kimball, once wrote, "I want to write a free cookbook for folks who know nothing about cooking. It would contain just 25 simple recipes, just about all one needs to know to be a good cook." (*Cook's Illustrated* magazine editorial, July-August 2014.) He is right about that. By the way, you won't find recipes for *Sardine Paté* or *Chopped Liver*. You'll need *our* book for that.

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.

On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen

(Harold McGee © 2004)

Whether you relate to the scientific angle or just like reading interesting stuff about food, this book is hard to put down. But as McGee says, “whenever we cook we become practical chemists,” and the more we understand about why food behaves the way it does, the more confident we will feel in the kitchen. McGee is fascinating, too; enthralled by chemistry and physics growing up, he first chose 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.”

Keys to Good Cooking

(Harold McGee © 2010)

Even if you don't cook enough to become a practiced cook, a good understanding of the process can make up for lack of experience. Harold McGee reminds us where our food comes from, explains the drawbacks of food processed in conventionally large-scale industrial systems, and cautions us to be skeptical, but not cynical, about the claims of alternative food production (like “organic” or “sustainable”); our choices have a cumulative effect and can still influence the agriculture and food industry. McGee has written the book that every cook would benefit from reading, but one that only a scientist who loves cooking could probably write. You can go as deep into the science of food as you choose or simply dip into the practical parts that interest you, like food storage and kitchen safety. Just about every piece of equipment, cooking technique, and ingredient is covered.

Dr. Bernstein's Diabetes Solution

(Richard K. Bernstein, M.D. © 2011)

This is a book for patients with diabetes who are prepared to declare war on abnormal

blood sugar, and it is not for the faint of heart. Dr. Bernstein is an endocrinologist diagnosed with diabetes at 12 years old, back in the “dark ages of diabetes treatment.” By the time he was 30 he was chronically ill and prematurely aged with diabetic complications. In 1969 he stumbled across an ad for a blood sugar meter, and he developed a protocol to normalize blood sugar by modifying diet, and successfully reversed his own deterioration. Around this time he entered medical school and became – what else? – an endocrinologist. His book outlines a multifactorial approach – including an extreme but effective low-carbohydrate diet – for achieving normal blood sugar and preventing diabetes-related complications. Dr. Bernstein differs from us in his use of many highly-processed foods, including artificial sweeteners, but it is easy for the reader to make appropriate adjustments.

Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy

The Harvard Medical School Guide to Healthy Eating

(Walter C. Willett, MD © 2001)

Dr. Willet presents both the science and common sense of eating well, and includes a large section on “the practical translation of nutritional science to food selection and preparation.” In 2006 Dr. Willet collaborated with Mollie Katzen (author of *Moosewood Cookbook* and many other cookbooks) on *Eat, Drink, and Weigh Less*, a book about sensible eating and weight loss without deprivation. Although (*sigh*), the recipes are too stingy with good fat and meal plans include processed breakfast cereals and sweetened fat-free yogurt, most of the book is helpful.

Oldways website

oldwayspt.org features traditional good food and cooking, with an emphasis on the Mediterranean diet model. There are all kinds of resources here – recipes, food facts, food sources, research summaries, and more. Make sure to type in the website accurately – there are many organizations with a similar name.