

A Smattering of Books

The various authors below don't necessarily agree with each other (or us), which helps remind us that there is plenty of uncertainty in the field of nutrition science. Stay flexible and keep reading. You'll be constantly fine-tuning your own rules, but the most important principle will keep floating to the top: good food is great medicine!

The Case Against Sugar

Gary Taubes © 2016

A consistent thread the alert reader will see in *Good Food, Great Medicine*, as well as our patient handouts and newsletters, is a warning against processed foods, of which sugars and refined grains appear to be the chief hazards. Taubes' polemic against sugar gives a great deal of background to the evidence that refined sugars are simply dangerous. He outlines their history, reasons for their popularity, and their association with most common chronic diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and dementia. Along the way he presents a riveting account of the battles between the various political camps within the field of nutrition, and the role of funding from the sugar industry in obscuring the risks from refined sugars.

Why We Get Fat

Gary Taubes © 2011

This is a hard-hitting analysis of the nutritional controversy surrounding obesity, and builds on Taubes' earlier book *Good Calories, Bad Calories*. There is a superb overview of the bad science which has dominated the obesity debate and the good science that has been ignored.

Good Calories, Bad Calories

Gary Taubes © 2008

The low-fat-is-better dietary hypothesis has held sway over the health care community for at least 40 years, and Gary Taubes does an excellent job of summarizing the historical controversy. 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 then 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. Yes!

Food Rules: An Eater's Manual

Michael Pollan © 2009

In his search for the answer to "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 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. "What an extraordinary achievement for a civilization to have developed the one diet that reliably makes its people sick!" Pollan points out an 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 also liked his mention of the Dutch proverb we often quote: "A land with a lot of herring can get along with few doctors."

In Defense of Food

Michael Pollan © 2008

This is the much longer (but just as enjoyable) precursor to *Food Rules*, with the same refreshing blend of common sense and humor. His eloquent defense of real food and scathing denunciation of what he calls "nutritionism" (which he describes as the "official ideology of the Food and Drug Administration") is hard-hitting and fact-packed. We don't always agree with Pollan's take on the social or political aspects of food production, but we have come to the same conclusions about what to eat and why.

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. (He has also become known for a YouTube lecture called *Sugar: The Bitter Truth*, but states that he would rather be known as the anti-processed food guy, not the anti-sugar guy, pointing 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.

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.

Dr. Bernstein's Diabetes Solution

Richard K. Bernstein, M.D. © 2011

This is for patients with diabetes who are ready to declare war on abnormal blood sugar; it's not for the faint of heart. Dr. Bernstein was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at age 12, back in the "dark ages of diabetes treatment." By the age of 30 he was chronically ill and prematurely aged with diabetic complications. In 1969 he stumbled across an ad for a blood sugar meter, and developed a protocol to normalize blood sugar by diet modification and successfully reversed his deterioration. He entered medical school and became – what else? – an endocrinologist. His book outlines a multifactorial approach, including an extreme but effective low-carbohydrate diet. 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.

The New Mediterranean Diet Cookbook

Nancy Harmon Jenkins © 2009

Nancy Jenkins' introduction and first two chapters make a perfect little primer on the Mediterranean diet when combined with the 7-page analysis *The Mediterranean Diet and Health* 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. Jenkins' 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, and points out that the food is familiar and easy to prepare. "Because Mediterranean cooking is, by and large, home cooking and not restaurant cuisine, it is improvisational and very forgiving." The recipes in the book range all over the Mediterranean, and the reader will want to make use of her *Mediterranean Methods, Materials, and Ingredients* on page 24. Jenkins also talks about the difference in cultural attitudes 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."

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. Planck adopted the fat-phobic vegetarian culture of that era after leaving for college in 1989; it wasn't until she opened London's first farmers' market ten years later that she rediscovered the real foods of her childhood. "My own farmers' markets rescued me... 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!

Extra Virginity

Tom Mueller © 2012

This beautifully written book does as much justice to the romance and ancient history of olive oil as it does to the corrupt underbelly of the modern extra-virgin olive oil global marketplace. You will find good reason to stick with domestically-produced olive oil (see page 114 of *Good Food, Great Medicine*) after reading this book.

Nourishing Traditions

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.

Passionate Vegetarian

Crescent Dragonwagon © 2002

Whether or not you are vegetarian (we aren't) 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.

Salted

Mark Bitterman © 2011

A fascinating and readable book, as any salt biography should be. We feel strongly about salt ourselves (page 115) and have tried to clarify the facts about it (pages 53–54), but I suspect we're definitely more relaxed about which salt we use than Bitterman! Even if you continue to use what he refers to as "industrial salt," you'll probably feel compelled to try at least one artisan salt. Either way, you'll never look at salt the same way again.