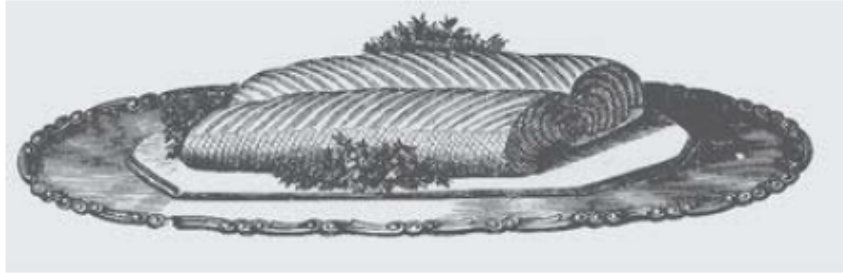


PART I

What should I eat?



(Eat food.)

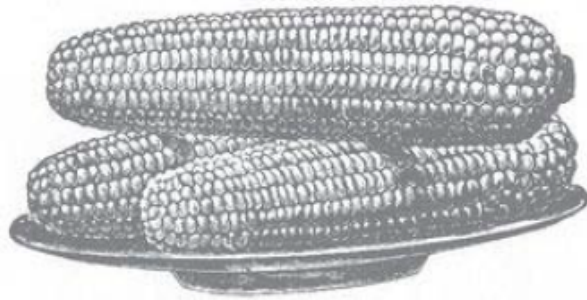
The rules in this section will help you to distinguish real foods - the plants, animals, and fungi people have been eating for generations - from the highly processed products of modern food science that, increasingly, have come to dominate the American food marketplace and diet. Each rule proposes a different filter for separating the one from the other, but they all share a common aim, which is to help you keep the unhealthy stuff out of your shopping cart.



1

Eat food.

These days this is easier said than done, especially when seventeen thousand new products show up in the supermarket each year, all vying for your food dollar. But most of these items don't deserve to be called food - I call them edible foodlike substances. They're highly processed concoctions designed by food scientists, consisting mostly of ingredients derived from corn and soy that no normal person keeps in the pantry, and they contain chemical additives with which the human body has not been long acquainted. Today much of the challenge of eating well comes down to choosing real food and avoiding these industrial novelties.



2

Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food.

Imagine your great-grandmother (or grandmother, depending on your age) at your side as you roll down the aisles of the supermarket. You're standing together in front of the dairy case. She picks up a package of Go-GURT Portable Yogurt tubes - and hasn't a clue what this plastic cylinder of colored and flavored gel could possibly be. Is it a food or is it toothpaste? There are now thousands of foodish products in the supermarket that our ancestors simply wouldn't recognize as food. The reasons to avoid eating such complicated food products are many, and go beyond the various chemical additives and corn and soy derivatives they contain, or the plastics in which they are typically packaged, some of which are probably toxic. Today foods are processed in ways specifically designed to get us to buy and eat more by pushing our evolutionary buttons - our inborn preferences for sweetness and fat and salt. These tastes are difficult to find in nature but cheap and easy for the food scientist to deploy, with the result that food processing induces us to consume much more of these rarities than is good for us. The great-grandma rule will help keep most of these items out of your cart.

Note: If your great-grandmother was a terrible cook or eater, you can substitute someone else's grandmother - a Sicilian or French one works particularly well.

The next several rules refine this strategy by helping you navigate the treacherous landscape of the ingredients label.

3

Avoid food products containing ingredients that no ordinary human would keep in the pantry.

Ethoxylated diglycerides? Cellulose? Xanthan gum? Calcium propionate? Ammonium sulfate? If you wouldn't cook with them yourself, why let others use these ingredients to cook for you? The food scientists' chemistry set is designed to extend shelf life, make old food look fresher and more appetizing than it really is, and get you to eat more. Whether or not any of these additives pose a proven hazard to your health, many of them haven't been eaten by humans for very long, so they are best avoided.



4

Avoid food products that contain high-fructose corn syrup.

Not because high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) is any worse for you than sugar, but because it is, like many of the other unfamiliar ingredients in packaged foods, a reliable marker for a food product that has been highly processed. Also, high-fructose corn syrup is being added to hundreds of foods that have not traditionally been sweetened - breads, condiments, and many snack foods - so if you avoid products that contain it, you will cut down on your sugar intake. But don't fall for the food industry's latest scam: products reformulated to contain "no HFCS" or "real cane sugar." These claims imply these foods are somehow healthier, but they're not. Sugar is sugar.



5

Avoid foods that have some form of sugar (or sweetener) listed among the top three ingredients.

Labels list ingredients by weight, and any product that has more sugar than other ingredients has too much sugar. (For an exception to this rule, see rule 60, regarding special occasion foods.) Complicating matters is the fact that, thanks to food science, there are now some forty types of sugar used in processed food, including barley malt, beet sugar, brown rice syrup, cane juice, corn sweetener, dextrin, dextrose, fructo-oligosaccharides, fruit juice concentrate, glucose, sucrose, invert sugar, polydextrose, sucrose, turbinado sugar, and so on. To repeat: Sugar is sugar. And organic sugar is sugar too. As for noncaloric sweeteners such as aspartame or Splenda, research (in both humans and animals) suggests that switching to artificial sweeteners does not lead to weight loss, for reasons not yet well understood. But it may be that deceiving the brain with the reward of sweetness stimulates a craving for even more sweetness.

6

Avoid food products that contain more than five ingredients.

The specific number you adopt is arbitrary, but the more ingredients in a packaged food, the more highly processed it probably is. Note 1: A long list of ingredients in a recipe is not the same thing; that's fine. Note 2: Some products now boast, somewhat deceptively, about their short ingredient lists. Häagen-Dazs has a new line of ice cream called "five." Great - but it's still ice cream. Same goes for the three-ingredient Tostitos corn chips advertised by Frito-Lay - okay, but they're still corn chips. In such cases, apply rule 60 for dealing with treats and special occasion foods.



7

Avoid food products containing ingredients that a third-grader cannot pronounce.

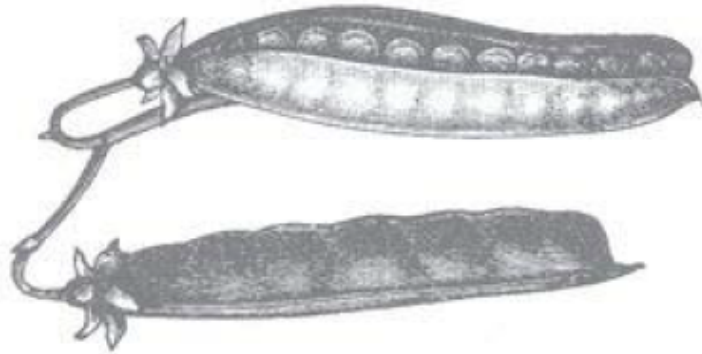
Basically the same idea, different mnemonic. Keep it simple!



8

Avoid food products that make health claims.

This sounds counterintuitive, but consider: For a product to carry a health claim on its package, it must first have a package, so right off the bat it's more likely to be a processed rather than a whole food. Then, only the big food manufacturers have the where-withal to secure FDA-approved health claims for their products and then trumpet them to the world. Generally, it is the products of modern food science that make the boldest health claims, and these are often founded on incomplete and often bad science. Don't forget that margarine, one of the first industrial foods to claim it was more healthful than the traditional food it replaced, turned out to contain trans fats that give people heart attacks. The healthiest food in the supermarket - the fresh produce - doesn't boast about its healthfulness, because the growers don't have the budget or the packaging. Don't take the silence of the yams as a sign they have nothing valuable to say about your health.



9

Avoid food products with the wordoid "lite" or the terms "low-fat" or "nonfat" in their names.

The forty-year-old campaign to create low-and nonfat versions of traditional foods has been a failure: We've gotten fat on low-fat products. Why? Because removing the fat from foods doesn't necessarily make them nonfattening.

Carbohydrates can also make you fat, and many low- and nonfat foods boost the sugars to make up for the loss of flavor. Also, by demonizing one nutrient - fat - we inevitably give a free pass to another, supposedly "good," nutrient - carbohydrates in this case - and then proceed to eat too much of that instead. Since the low-fat campaign began in the late 1970s, Americans actually have been eating more than 500 additional calories per day, most of them in the form of refined carbohydrates like sugar. The result: The average male is seventeen pounds heavier and the average female nineteen pounds heavier than in the late 1970s. You're better off eating the real thing in moderation than bingeing on "lite" food products packed with sugars and salt.

10

Avoid foods that are pretending to be something they are not.

Imitation butter - aka margarine - is the classic example. To make something like nonfat cream cheese that contains neither cream nor cheese requires an extreme degree of processing; such products should be labeled as imitations and avoided. The same rule applies to soy-based mock meats, artificial sweeteners, and fake fats and starches.



11

Avoid foods you see advertised on television.

Food marketers are ingenious at turning criticisms of their products - and rules like these - into new ways to sell slightly different versions of the same processed foods: They simply reformulate (to be low-fat, have no HFCS or trans fats, or to contain fewer ingredients) and then boast about their implied healthfulness, whether the boast is meaningful or not. The best way to escape these marketing ploys is to tune out the marketing itself, by refusing to buy heavily promoted foods. Only the biggest food manufacturers can afford to advertise their products on television: More than two thirds of food advertising is spent promoting processed foods (and alcohol), so if you avoid products with big ad budgets, you'll automatically be avoiding edible foodlike substances. As for the 5 percent of food ads that promote whole foods (the prune or walnut growers or the beef ranchers), common sense will, one hopes, keep you from tarring them with the same brush - these are the exceptions that prove the rule.

Bogus health claims and faulty food science have made supermarkets particularly treacherous places to shop for real food, which suggests the next two rules.

12

Shop the peripheries of the supermarket and stay out of the middle.

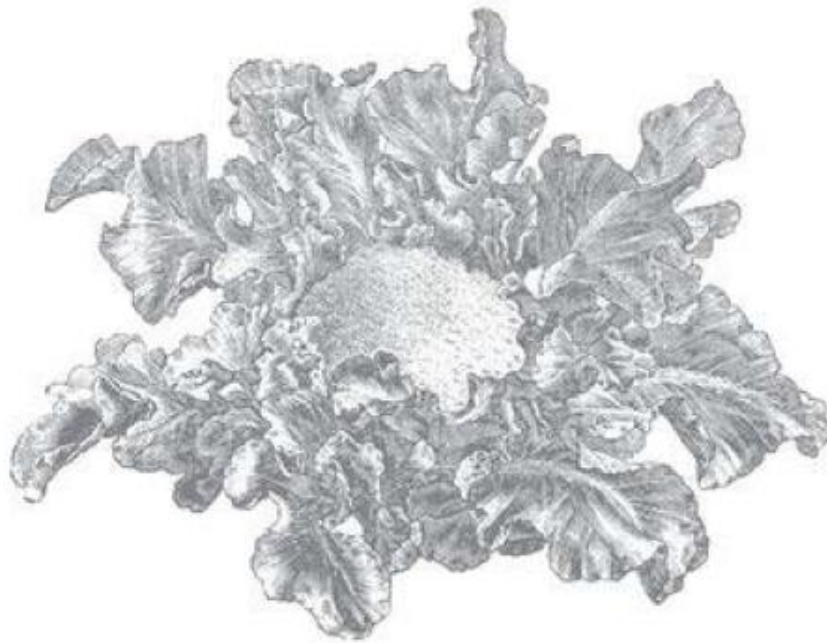
Most supermarkets are laid out the same way: Processed food products dominate the center aisles of the store, while the cases of mostly fresh food - produce, meat and fish, dairy - line the walls. If you keep to the edges of the store you'll be much more likely to wind up with real food in your shopping cart. This strategy is not foolproof, however, since things like high-fructose corn syrup have crept into the dairy case under the cover of flavored yogurts and the like.



13

Eat only foods that will eventually rot.

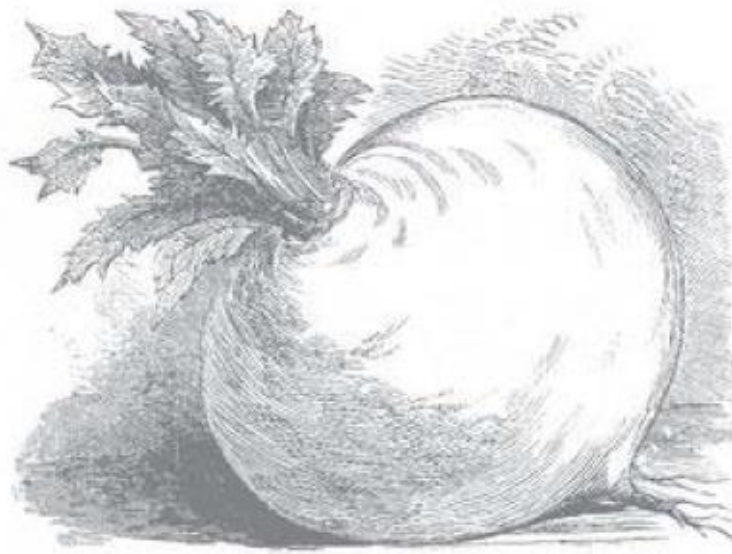
What does it mean for food to "go bad"? It usually means that the fungi and bacteria and insects and rodents with whom we compete for nutrients and calories have gotten to it before we did. Food processing began as a way to extend the shelf life of food by protecting it from these competitors. This is often accomplished by making the food less appealing to them, by removing nutrients from it that attract competitors, or by removing other nutrients likely to turn rancid, like omega-3 fatty acids. The more processed a food is, the longer the shelf life, and the less nutritious it typically is. Real food is alive - and therefore it should eventually die. (There are a few exceptions to this rule: For example, honey has a shelf life measured in centuries.) Note: Most of the immortal foodlike substances in the supermarket are found in the middle aisles.



14

Eat foods made from ingredients that you can picture in their raw state or growing in nature.

Read the ingredients on a package of Twinkies or Pringles and imagine what those ingredients actually look like raw or in the places where they grow: You can't do it. This rule will keep all sorts of chemicals and foodlike substances out of your diet.



15

Get out of the supermarket whenever you can.

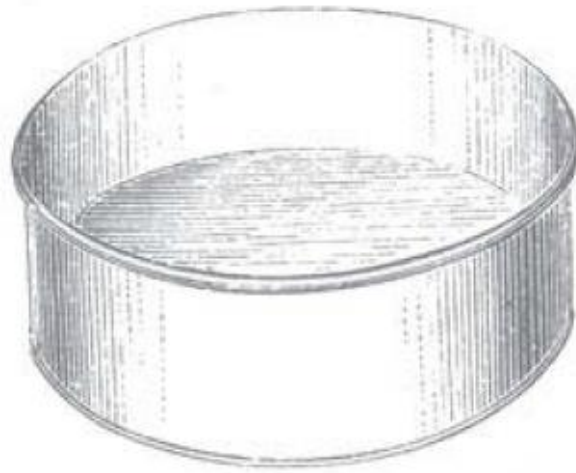
You won't find any high-fructose corn syrup at the farmers' market. You also won't find any elaborately processed food products, any packages with long lists of unpronounceable ingredients or dubious health claims, anything microwaveable, or, perhaps best of all, any old food from far away. What you will find are fresh, whole foods harvested at the peak of their taste and nutritional quality - precisely the kind your great-grandmother, or even your Neolithic ancestors, would easily recognize as food. The kind that is alive and eventually will rot.



16

Buy your snacks at the farmers' market.

You'll find yourself snacking on fresh or dried fruits and nuts
- real food - rather than chips and sweets.

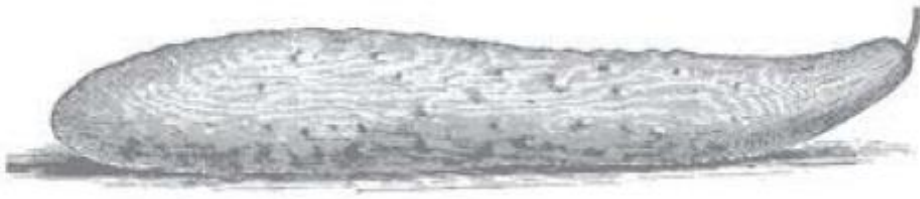


17

Eat only foods that have been cooked by humans.

If you're going to let others cook for you, you're much better off if they are other humans, rather than corporations. In general, corporations cook with too much salt, fat, and sugar, as well as with preservatives, colorings, and other biological novelties. They also aim for immortality in their food products. Note: While it is true that professional chefs are generally humans, they often cook with large amounts of salt, fat, and sugar too, so treat restaurant meals as special occasions.

Following are a few useful variants on the human-cooked-food rule.



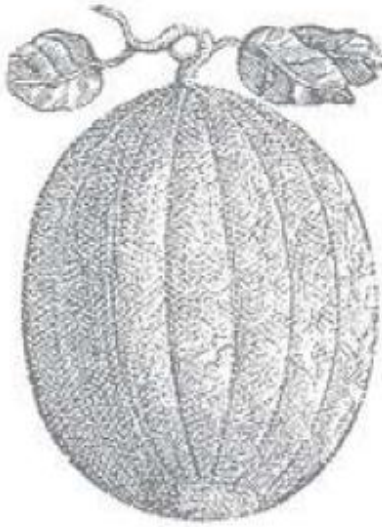
18

Don't ingest foods made in places where everyone is
required to wear a surgical cap.



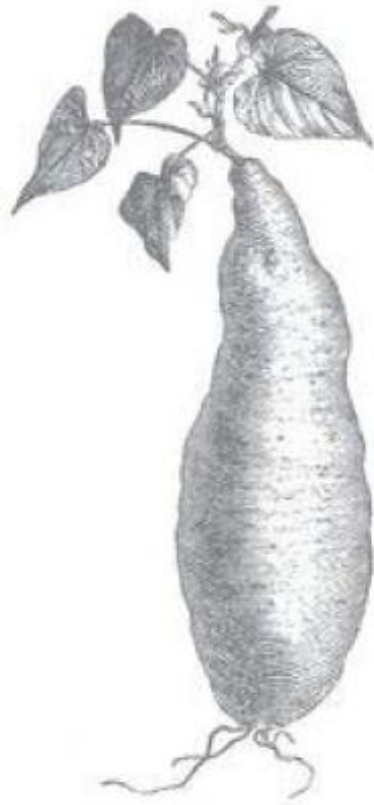
19

If it came from a plant, eat it; if it was made in a plant,
don't.



20

It's not food if it arrived through the window of your car.



21

It's not food if it's called by the same name in every language. (Think Big Mac, Cheetos, or Pringles.)

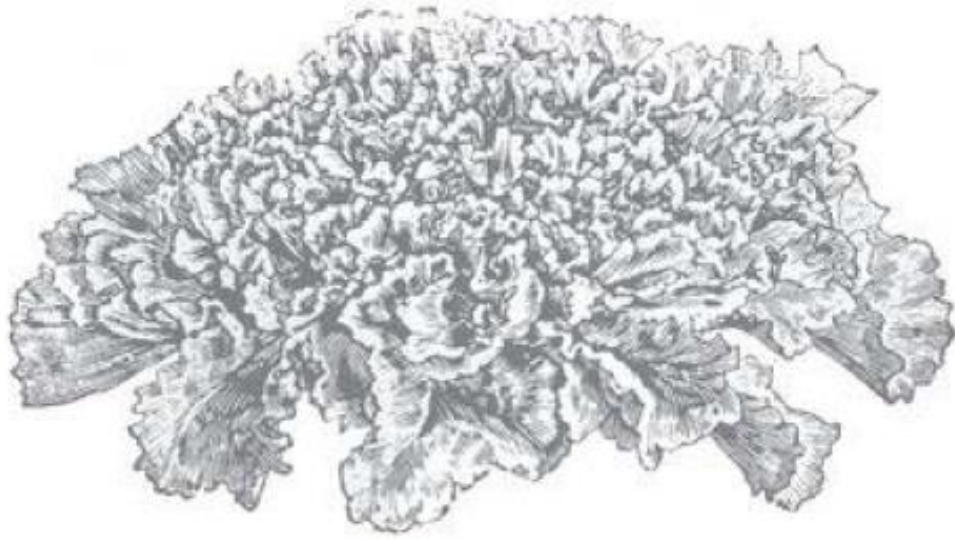
PART II

What kind of food should I eat?



(Mostly plants.)

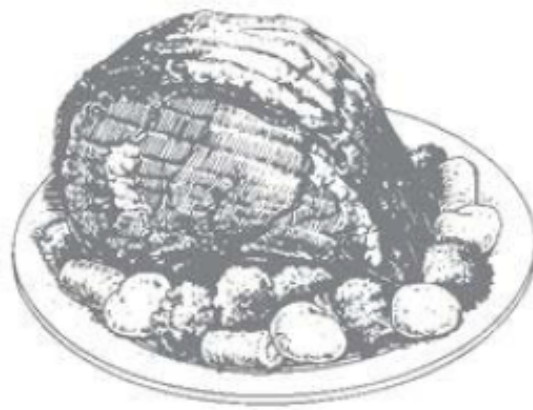
If you follow the rules offered thus far you will be eating real, whole food most of the time - the simple key to a healthy diet. Beyond that, you have a great many options. One lesson that can be drawn from the striking diversity of traditional diets people have lived on around the world is that it is possible to nourish ourselves from an astonishing range of foods - so long as they really are foods. There have been, and can be, healthy high-fat and healthy low-fat diets, but they have always been diets built around whole foods. Yet there are some whole foods that are better for us than others, and some ways of producing them and then combining them in meals that can make a difference. So the rules in this section propose a handful of personal policies regarding what to eat, above and beyond "food."



22

Eat mostly plants, especially leaves.

Scientists may disagree on what's so good about plants - the antioxidants? the fiber? the omega-3 fatty acids? - but they do agree that they're probably really good for you and certainly can't hurt. There are scores of studies demonstrating that a diet rich in vegetables and fruits reduces the risk of dying from all the Western diseases; in countries where people eat a pound or more of vegetables and fruits a day, the rate of cancer is half what it is in the United States. Also, by eating a diet that is primarily plant based, you'll be consuming far fewer calories, since plant foods - with the exception of seeds, including grains and nuts - are typically less "energy dense" than the other things you eat. (And consuming fewer calories protects against many chronic diseases.) Vegetarians are notably healthier than carnivores, and they live longer.



23

Treat meat as a flavoring or special occasion food.

While it's true that vegetarians are generally healthier than carnivores, that doesn't mean you need to eliminate meat from your diet if you like it. Meat, which humans have been eating and relishing for a very long time, is nourishing food, which is why I suggest "mostly" plants, not "only." It turns out that near vegetarians, or "flexitarians" - people who eat meat a couple of times a week - are just as healthy as vegetarians. But the average American eats meat as part of two or even three meals a day - more than half a pound per person per day - and there is evidence that the more meat there is in your diet - red meat in particular - the greater your risk of heart disease and cancer. Why? It could be its saturated fat, or its specific type of protein, or the simple fact that all that meat is pushing plants off the plate. Consider swapping the traditional portion sizes: Instead of an eight-ounce steak and a four-ounce portion of vegetables, serve four ounces of beef and eight ounces of veggies. Thomas Jefferson was probably onto something when he recommended a mostly plant-based diet that uses meat chiefly as a "flavor principle."

"Eating what stands on one leg [mushrooms and plant foods] is better than eating what stands on two legs [fowl], which is better than eating what stands on four legs [cows, pigs, and other mammals]."

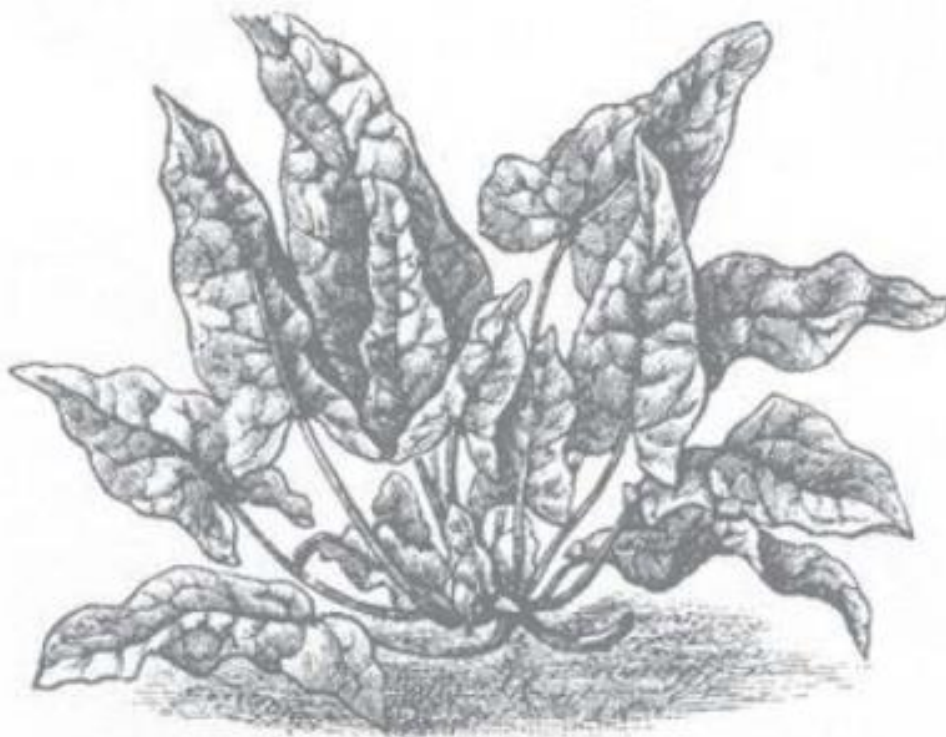
This Chinese proverb offers a good summary of traditional wisdom regarding the relative healthfulness of different kinds of food, though it inexplicably leaves out the very healthful and entirely legless fish.



25

Eat your colors.

The idea that a healthy plate of food will feature several different colors is a good example of an old wives' tale about food that turns out to be good science too. The colors of many vegetables reflect the different antioxidant phytochemicals they contain - anthocyanins, polyphenols, flavonoids, carotenoids. Many of these chemicals help protect against chronic diseases, but each in a slightly different way, so the best protection comes from a diet containing as many different phytochemicals as possible.



26

Drink the spinach water.

Another bit of traditional wisdom with good science behind it: The water in which vegetables are cooked is rich in vitamins and other healthful plant chemicals. Save it for soup or add it to sauces.



27

Eat animals that have themselves eaten well.

The diet of the animals we eat strongly influences the nutritional quality, and healthfulness, of the food we get from them, whether it is meat or milk or eggs. This should be self-evident, yet it is a truth routinely overlooked by the industrial food chain in its quest to produce vast quantities of cheap animal protein. That quest has changed the diet of most of our food animals in ways that have often damaged their health and healthfulness. We feed animals a high-energy diet of grain to make them grow quickly, even in the case of ruminants that have evolved to eat grass. But even food animals that can tolerate grain are much healthier when they have access to green plants - and so, it turns out, are their meat and eggs. The food from these animals will contain much healthier types of fat (more omega-3s, less omega-6s) as well as appreciably higher levels of vitamins and antioxidants. (For the same reason, meat from wild animals is particularly nutritious; see rule 31.) It's worth looking for pastured animal foods in the market - and paying the premium prices they typically command if you can.

If you have the space, buy a freezer.

When you find a good source of pastured meat, you'll want to buy it in quantity. Buying meat in bulk - a quarter of a steer, say, or a whole hog - is one way to eat well on a budget. Dedicated freezers are surprisingly inexpensive to buy and to operate, because they aren't opened nearly as often as the one in your refrigerator. A freezer will also enable you to put up food from the farmers' market, and encourage you to buy produce in bulk at the height of its season, when it will be most abundant - and therefore cheapest. And freezing does not significantly diminish the nutritional value of produce.



29

Eat like an omnivore.

Whether or not you eat any animal foods, it's a good idea to try to add some new species, and not just new foods, to your diet - that is, new kinds of plants, animals, and fungi. The dazzling diversity of food products on offer in the supermarket is deceptive, because so many of them are made from the same small handful of plant species, and most of those - the corn and soy and wheat - are seeds rather than leaves. The greater the diversity of species you eat, the more likely you are to cover all your nutritional bases.



30

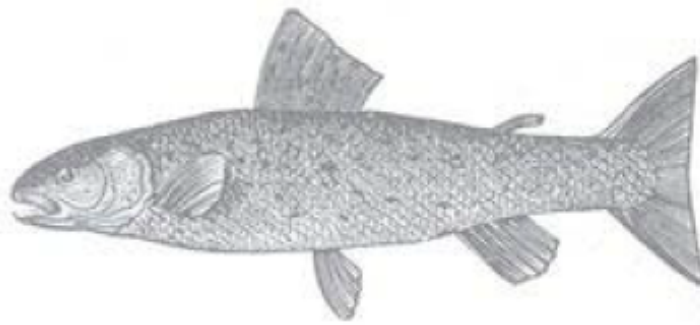
Eat well-grown food from healthy soil.

It would have been easier to say "eat organic," and it is true that food certified organic is usually well grown in relatively healthy soil - soil nourished by organic matter rather than chemical fertilizers. (It also will contain little or no residue from synthetic pesticides or pharmaceuticals.) Yet there are exceptional farmers and ranchers in America who for one reason or another are not certified organic, and the excellent food they grow should not be overlooked. (And just because a food is labeled organic does not mean it's good for you: Organic soda is still soda - a large quantity of utterly empty calories.)

We now have a body of research supporting the hypothesis, first advanced by organic pioneers Sir Albert Howard and J.I. Rodale, that soils rich in organic matter produce more nutritious food: that is, food with higher levels of antioxidants, flavonoids, vitamins, and minerals. Of course, after a few days riding cross-country in a truck, the nutritional quality of any kind of produce will deteriorate, so ideally you want to eat food that is both organic *and* local.

Eat wild foods when you can.

Two of the most nutritious plants in the world - lamb's quarters and purslane - are weeds, and some of the healthiest traditional diets, like the Mediterranean, make frequent use of wild greens. The fields and forests are crowded with plants containing higher levels of various phytochemicals than their domesticated cousins. Why? Because these plants have to defend themselves against pests and diseases without any help from us, and because historically we've tended to select and breed crop plants for sweetness; many of the defensive compounds plants produce are bitter. We also breed for shelf life, and so have unwittingly selected for plants with low levels of omega-3 fatty acids, since these fats quickly oxidize - turn rancid. Wild animals and fish too are worth adding to your diet when you have the opportunity. Wild game generally has less saturated and more healthy fats than domesticated animals, because most of these wild animals themselves eat a diverse diet of plants rather than grain (see rule 27).



32

Don't overlook the oily little fishes.

Wild fish are among the healthiest things you can eat, yet many wild fish stocks are on the verge of collapse because of overfishing. Avoid big fish at the top of the marine food chain - tuna, sword-fish, shark - because they're endangered, and because they often contain high levels of mercury. Fortunately, a few of the most nutritious wild fish species, including mackerel, sardines, and anchovies, are well managed, and in some cases are even abundant. Those oily little fish are particularly good choices. According to a Dutch proverb, "A land with lots of herring can get along with few doctors."



33

Eat some foods that have been predigested by bacteria or fungi.

Many traditional cultures swear by the health benefits of fermented foods - foods that have been transformed by live microorganisms, such as yogurt, sauerkraut, soy sauce, kimchi, and sourdough bread. These foods can be a good source of vitamin B₁₂, an essential nutrient you can't get from plants. (B₁₂ is produced by animals and bacteria.) Many fermented foods also contain probiotics - beneficial bacteria that research suggests improve the function of the digestive and immune systems and, according to some studies, help reduce allergic reactions and inflammation.



34

Sweeten and salt your food yourself.

Whether soups or cereals or soft drinks, foods and beverages that have been prepared by corporations contain far higher levels of salt and sugar than any ordinary human would ever add - even a child. By sweetening and salting these foods yourself, you'll make them to your taste, and you will find you're consuming a fraction as much sugar and salt as you otherwise would.



35

Eat sweet foods as you find them in nature.

In nature, sugars almost always come packaged with fiber, which slows their absorption and gives you a sense of satiety before you've ingested too many calories. That's why you're always better off eating the fruit rather than drinking its juice. (In general, calories taken in liquid form are more fattening because they don't make us feel full. Humans are one of the very few mammals that obtain calories from liquids after weaning.) So don't drink your sweets, and remember: There is no such thing as a healthy soda.



36

Don't eat breakfast cereals that change the color of the milk.

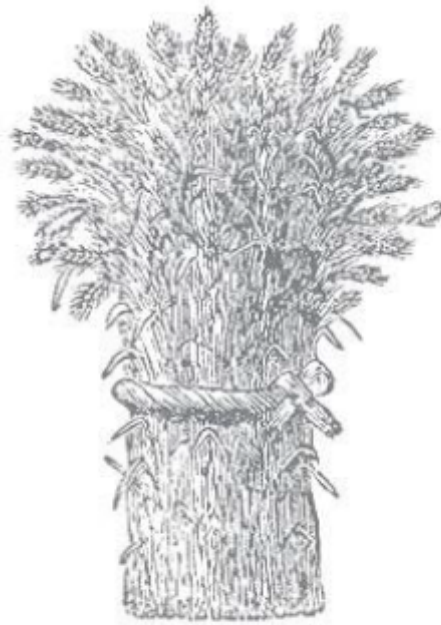
This should go without saying. Such cereals are highly processed and full of refined carbohydrates as well as chemical additives.



37

"The whiter the bread, the sooner you'll be dead."

This rather blunt bit of cross-cultural grand-motherly advice (passed down from both Jewish and Italian grandmothers) suggests that the health risks of white flour have been popularly recognized for many years. As far as the body is concerned, white flour is not much different from sugar. Unless supplemented, it offers none of the good things (fiber, B vitamins, healthy fats) in whole grains - it's little more than a shot of glucose. Large spikes of glucose are inflammatory and wreak havoc on our insulin metabolism. Eat whole grains and minimize your consumption of white flour. Recent research indicates that the grandmothers who lived by this rule were right: People who eat lots of whole grains tend to be healthier and to live longer.



38

Favor the kinds of oils and grains that have traditionally been stone-ground.

When grindstones were the only way to refine flour and oil, flour and oil were generally more nutritious. In the case of grain, more of the germ and fiber remains when it is ground on a stone; you can't get white flour from a stone. The nutritional benefits of whole grains are impressive: fiber; the full range of B vitamins; and healthy oils, all of which are sacrificed when the grain is refined on modern roller mills (as mentioned, highly refined flours are little different from sugar). And the newer oils that are extracted by modern chemical means tend to have less favorable fatty acid profiles and more additives than olive, sesame, palm fruit, and peanut oils that have been obtained the old-fashioned way.



39

Eat all the junk food you want as long as you cook it yourself.

There is nothing wrong with eating sweets, fried foods, pastries, even drinking a soda every now and then, but food manufacturers have made eating these formerly expensive and hard-to-make treats so cheap and easy that we're eating them every day. The french fry did not become America's most popular vegetable until industry took over the jobs of washing, peeling, cutting, and frying the potatoes - and cleaning up the mess. If you made all the french fries you ate, you would eat them much less often, if only because they're so much work. The same holds true for fried chicken, chips, cakes, pies, and ice cream. Enjoy these treats as often as you're willing to prepare them - chances are good it won't be every day.



40

Be the kind of person who takes supplements - then skip the supplements.

We know that people who take supplements are generally healthier than the rest of us, and we also know that in controlled studies most of the supplements they take don't appear to be effective. How can this be? Supplement takers are healthy for reasons that have nothing to do with the pills. They're typically more health conscious, better educated, and more affluent. They're also more likely to exercise and eat whole grains. So to the extent you can, be the *kind* of person who would take supplements, and then save your money. (There are exceptions to this rule, for people who have a specific nutrient deficiency or are older than fifty. As we age, our need for antioxidants increases while our body's ability to absorb them from the diet declines. And if you don't eat much fish, it couldn't hurt to take a fish oil supplement too.)



41

Eat more like the French. Or the Japanese. Or the
Italians. Or the Greeks.

People who eat according to the rules of a traditional food culture are generally healthier than those of us eating a modern Western diet of processed foods. Any traditional diet will do: If it were not a healthy diet, the people who follow it wouldn't still be around. True, food cultures are embedded in societies and economies and ecologies, and some of them travel better than others, Inuit not so well as Italian. In borrowing from a food culture, pay attention to *how* a culture eats as well as to what it eats. In the case of the French paradox, for example, it may not be the dietary nutrients that keep the French healthy (lots of saturated fat and white flour?!) as much as their food habits: small portions eaten at leisurely communal meals; no second helpings or snacking. Pay attention, too, to the combinations of foods in traditional cultures: In Latin America, corn is traditionally cooked with lime and eaten with beans; what would otherwise be a nutritionally deficient staple becomes the basis of a healthy, balanced diet. (The beans supply amino acids lacking in corn, and the lime makes niacin available.) Cultures that took corn from Latin America without the beans or the lime wound up with serious nutritional deficiencies such as pellagra. Traditional diets are more than the sum of their food parts.

Regard nontraditional foods with skepticism.

Innovation is always interesting, but when it comes to food, it pays to approach new creations with caution. If diets are the products of an evolutionary process in which groups of people adapt to the plants, animals, and fungi a particular place has to offer, then a novel food or culinary innovation resembles a mutation: It *might* represent an evolutionary improvement, but chances are it doesn't. Soy products offer a good case in point. People have been eating soy in the form of tofu, soy sauce, and tempeh for many generations, but today we're eating novelties like "soy protein isolate," "soy isoflavones," and "textured vegetable protein" from soy and partially hydrogenated soy oils, and there are questions about the healthfulness of these new food products. As a senior FDA scientist has written, "Confidence that soy products are safe is clearly based more on belief than hard data."³ Until we have that data, you're probably better off eating soy prepared in the traditional Asian manner than according to the novel recipes dreamed up by food scientists.

Have a glass of wine with dinner.

Wine may not be the magic bullet in the French or Mediterranean diet, but it does seem to be an integral part of these dietary patterns. There is now considerable scientific evidence for the health benefits of alcohol to go with a few centuries of traditional belief and anecdotal evidence. Mindful of the social and health effects of alcoholism, public health authorities are loath to recommend drinking, but the fact is that people who drink moderately and regularly live longer and suffer considerably less heart disease than teetotalers. Alcohol of any kind appears to reduce the risk of heart disease, but the polyphenols in red wine (resveratrol in particular) may have unique protective qualities. Most experts recommend no more than two drinks a day for men, one for women. Also, the health benefits of alcohol may depend as much on the pattern of drinking as on the amount: Drinking a little every day is better than drinking a lot on the weekends, and drinking with food is better than drinking without it. Someday science may figure out the complex synergies at work in a traditional diet that includes wine, but until then we can marvel at its accumulated wisdom - and raise a glass to paradox.

PART III

How should I eat?



(Not too much.)

The rules in the previous two sections deal primarily with questions about what to eat; the ones in this section deal with something a bit more elusive but no less important: the set of manners, eating habits, taboos, and unspoken guidelines that together govern a person's (and a culture's) relationship to food and eating. *How* you eat may have as much bearing on your health (and your weight) as *what* you eat.

This may well be the deeper lesson of the so-called French paradox: the mystery (at least to nutritionists) of a population that eats all sorts of supposedly lethal fatty foods, and washes them down with red wine, but which is nevertheless healthier, slimmer, and slightly longer lived than we are. What nutritionists fail to see in the French is a people with a completely different relationship to food than we have. They seldom snack, eat small portions from small plates, don't go back for second helpings, and eat most of their food at long, leisurely meals shared with other people. The rules governing these behaviors may matter more than any magic nutrient in their diet.

The rules in this section are designed to foster a healthier relationship to food, whatever it is you're eating.



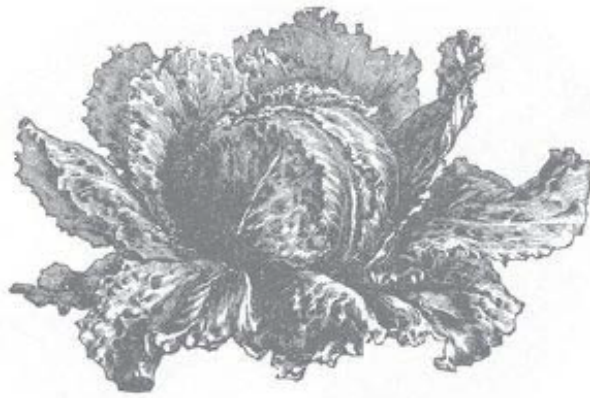
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Pay more, eat less.

With food, as with so many things, you get what you pay for. There is also a trade-off between quality and quantity, and a person's "food experience" - a meal's duration or quotient of pleasure - does not necessarily correlate with the number of calories consumed. The American food system has for many years devoted its energies to increasing quantity and reducing price rather than to improving quality. There's no escaping the fact that better food - measured by taste or nutritional quality (which often correspond) - costs more, because it has been grown or raised less intensively and with more care. Not everyone can afford to eat well in America, which is a literal shame, but most of us can: Americans spend less than 10 percent of their income on food, less than the citizens of any other nation. As the cost of food in America has declined, in terms of both price and the effort required to put it on the table, we have been eating much more (and spending more on health care). If you spend more for better food, you'll probably eat less of it, and treat it with more care. And if that higher-quality food tastes better, you will need less of it to feel satisfied. Choose quality over quantity, food experience over mere calories. Or as grandmothers used to say, "Better to pay the grocer than the doctor."

. . . Eat less.

This is probably the most unwelcome advice of all, but in fact the scientific case for eating a lot less than we currently do - regardless of whether you are overweight - is compelling. "Calorie restriction" has repeatedly been shown to slow aging in animals, and many researchers believe it offers the single strongest link between diet and cancer prevention. We eat much more than our bodies need to be healthy, and the excess wreaks havoc - and not just on our weight. But we are not the first people in history to grapple with the special challenges posed by food abundance, and previous cultures have devised various ways to promote the idea of moderation. The rules that follow offer a few proven strategies.



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Stop eating before you're full.

Nowadays we think it is normal and right to eat until you are full, but many cultures specifically advise stopping well before that point is reached. The Japanese have a saying: *hara hachi bu* - counseling people to stop eating when they are 80 percent full. The Ayurvedic tradition in India advises eating until you are 75 percent full; the Chinese specify 70 percent, and the prophet Muhammad described a full belly as one that contained â...“ food and â...“ liquid - and â...“ air, i.e., nothing. (Note the relatively narrow range specified in all this advice: somewhere between 67 and 80 percent of capacity. Take your pick.) There's also a German expression that says: "You need to tie off the sack before it gets completely full." And how many of us have grand-parents who talk of "leaving the table a little bit hungry"? Here again the French may have something to teach us. To say "I'm hungry" in French you say "J'ai faim" - "I have hunger" - and when you are finished, you do not say that you are full, but "Je n'ai plus faim" - "I have no more hunger." That is a completely different way of thinking about satiety. So: Ask yourself not, Am I full? but, Is my hunger gone? That moment will arrive several bites sooner.

Eat when you are hungry, not when you are bored.

For many of us, eating has surprisingly little to do with hunger. We eat out of boredom, for entertainment, to comfort or reward ourselves. Try to be aware of *why* you're eating, and ask yourself if you're really hungry - before you eat and then again along the way. (One old wives' test: If you're not hungry enough to eat an apple, then you're not hungry.) Food is a costly antidepressant.



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Consult your gut.

Most of us allow external, and usually visual, cues to determine how much we eat. The larger the portion, for example, the more we eat; the bigger the container, the more we pour. As in so many areas of modern life, the culture of food has become a culture of the eye. But when it comes to food, it pays to cultivate the other senses, which often provide more useful and accurate information. It can take twenty minutes before your brain gets the word that your belly is full; that means that if you take less than twenty minutes to finish a meal, the sensation of satiety will arrive too late to be of any use. So slow down and pay attention to what your body - and not just your sense of sight - is telling you. This is what your grand-parents were getting at with the adage "Your eyes are bigger than your stomach."