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# TIME

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## Six Rules for Eating Wisely

By Michael Pollan

Once upon a time Americans had a culture of food to guide us through the increasingly treacherous landscape of food choices: fat vs. carbs, organic vs. conventional, vegetarian vs. carnivorous. Culture in this case is just a fancy way of saying "your mom." She taught us what to eat, when to eat it, how much of it to eat, even the order in which to eat it. But Mom's influence over the dinner menu has proved no match for the \$36 billion in food-marketing dollars (\$10 billion directed to kids alone) designed to get us to eat more, eat all manner of dubious neofoods, and create entire new eating occasions, such as in the car. Some food culture.

I've spent the past five years exploring this daunting food landscape, following the industrial food chain from the Happy Meal back to the not-so-happy feedlots in Kansas and cornfields in Iowa where it begins and tracing the organic food chain back to the farms. My aim was simply to figure out what--as a nutritional, ethical, political and environmental matter--I should eat. Along the way, I've collected a few rules of thumb that may be useful in navigating what I call the Omnivore's Dilemma.

Don't eat anything your great-great-great grandmother wouldn't recognize as food. Imagine how baffled your ancestors would be in a modern supermarket: the epoxy-like tubes of Go-Gurt, the preternaturally fresh Twinkies, the vaguely pharmaceutical Vitamin Water. Those aren't foods, quite; they're food products. History suggests you might want to wait a few decades or so before adding such novelties to your diet, the substitution of margarine for butter being the classic case in point. My mother used to predict "they" would eventually discover that butter was better for you. She was right: the trans-fatty margarine is killing us. Eat food, not food products.

Avoid foods containing high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS). It's not just in cereals and soft drinks but also in ketchup and bologna, baked goods, soups and salad dressings. Though HFCS was not part of the human diet until 1975, each of us now consumes more than 40 lbs. a year, some 200 calories a day. Is HFCS any worse for you than sugar? Probably not, but by avoiding it you'll avoid thousands of empty calories and perhaps even more important, cut out highly processed foods--the ones that contain the most sugar, fat and

salt. Besides, what chef uses high-fructose corn syrup? Not one. It's found only in the pantry of the food scientist, and that's not who you want cooking your meals.

Spend more, eat less. Americans are as addicted to cheap food as we are to cheap oil. We spend only 9.7% of our income on food, a smaller share than any other nation. Is it a coincidence we spend a larger percentage than any other on health care (16%)? All this "cheap food" is making us fat and sick. It's also bad for the health of the environment. The higher the quality of the food you eat, the more nutritious it is and the less of it you'll need to feel satisfied.

Pay no heed to nutritional science or the health claims on packages. It was science that told us margarine made from trans fats is better for us than butter made from cow's milk. The more I learn about the science of nutrition, the less certain I am that we've learned anything important about food that our ancestors didn't know. Consider that the healthiest foods in the supermarket--the fresh produce--are the ones that don't make FDA-approved health claims, which typically festoon the packages of the most highly processed foods. When Whole Grain Lucky Charms show up in the cereal aisle, it's time to stop paying attention to health claims.

Shop at the farmers' market. You'll begin to eat foods in season, when they are at the peak of their nutritional value and flavor, and you'll cook, because you won't find anything processed or microwavable. You'll also be supporting farmers in your community, helping defend the countryside from sprawl, saving oil by eating food produced nearby and teaching your children that a carrot is a root, not a machine-lathed orange bullet that comes in a plastic bag. A lot more is going on at the farmers' market than the exchange of money for food.

How you eat is as important as what you eat. Americans are fixated on nutrients, good and bad, while the French and Italians focus on the whole eating experience. The lesson of the "French paradox" is you can eat all kinds of supposedly toxic substances (triple cr me cheese, foie gras) as long as you follow your culture's (i.e., mother's) rules: eat moderate portions, don't go for seconds or snacks between meals, never eat alone. But perhaps most important, eat with pleasure, because eating with anxiety leads to poor digestion and bingeing. There is no French paradox, really, only an American paradox: a notably unhealthy people obsessed with the idea of eating healthily. So, relax. Eat Food. And savor it.

> Michael Pollan's newest book is *The Omnivore's Dilemma*

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6 Rules for Eating Leftovers. No leftover-leftovers. You get to heat up your leftovers once and only once. When you're reheating, take out only the portion you plan to eat. Heat it thoroughly to 165° to kill off any potential cooties. Do not heat up the whole tray of lasagna if you're just going to have one serving. If you don't finish the serving, toss it. Contain wisely. I strongly recommend storing your food in glass, porcelain and stainless steel, but if you choose a plastic container for storage or drinking, make sure it's BPA free. We know that BPA is released with heat, so don't heat your foods in plastic, allow plastic wrap to touch your foods in the microwave, or drink from the water bottle after it has baked in the sun. BPA is in the lining of many aluminum cans too, so don't heat your food in a can. Ever! In these articles, Pollan suggests that though HFCS may not be harmful in and of itself, avoiding HFCS will help individuals avoid eating highly-processed foods, which contain the largest amounts of sugar, fat, and salt. Curt Ellis and Ian Cheney[edit]. Curt Ellis and Ian Cheney are the makers of the film documentary King Corn. "Six Rules for Eating Wisely". TIME". <http://michaelpollan.com/articles-archive/six-rules-for-eating-wisely/>. "Pollan, M. (2002). "When a Crop Becomes King".