No Fads or Banned Foods: Healthy Whole Food Eating

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Did you know that:

Eating well can add a DECADE to your life?

Healthier diets could save the United States $87 billion per year?

By eating at least 5 servings of vegetables and fruits a day, you can reduce your risk of stroke and heart disease by 30%, lose weight, and enhance your immune system so you don’t get sick as often?

In fact, a diet based on a high fruit and vegetable intake, regular physical activity, and low to moderate alcohol intake, are associated with reductions in the incidence of certain chronic diseases, according to a study published in the journal PLoS Medicine from the Public Library of Science. ([source](#))

According to the Center for Disease Control and studies done by various health organizations, a whole foods diet can be one of the healthiest ways to eat. A whole foods diet doesn’t mean eating foods only from Whole Foods market, though.

It means choosing good fats, foods that are as close to their original form as possible and staying away from processed foods.

A whole foods way of eating isn’t a diet fad. It’s more of a way of eating or a lifestyle. Healthy whole foods eating means eating fresh fruits and vegetables every day, eating fish and grass-fed meats as well as fiber rich whole grains.

Research shows that omega-3 fats found in fish like salmon is a big health booster, fighting heart disease, stroke, hypertension, depression, and even Alzheimer's disease and osteoporosis, says Diane McKay, PhD, a researcher with the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University.

Choosing a whole foods-rich diet is a good way to make certain that what you eat is rich in micronutrients and free of unnecessary additives. With the wide variety of whole foods available, they are by far the best ingredients for creating tasty and healthy meals. And diets loaded with whole, unrefined and unprocessed foods might help keep you healthy.

So what are foods and micronutrients? How do you serve them? Hang on, because throughout this guide we’re going to give you the facts on what whole foods are and the best way to serve them. We’ll give you some tips for your whole foods shopping trips and even tell you how you can avoid going to the extreme of a whole foods diet.

Let’s get started.
What are whole foods?

You’ve probably been exposed to a whole foods diet in some way. It might be you have an aunt who is eating a low carb/high fat diet or a friend who is on the raw foods diet. These are forms of a whole foods diet, although they are extreme. We’ll discuss taking the diet to the extreme in a bit. First I want to tell you about what a whole foods eating style is.

Is it a diet or a lifestyle? Eating whole foods is a way of eating. It's not a diet. Actually a whole foods diet is a healthy way to diet, if you want to lose weight. But it's a diet that can be eaten the rest of your life.

Are the foods raw, cooked or processed? A whole foods diet means eating food that is closest to its most natural state. Does this mean you have to eat everything raw? No. It simply means that foods should be unprocessed.

Whole foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, and legumes will retain their fiber and other beneficial phytochemicals and nutrients. These micronutrients are often removed in processed foods.

A whole foods way of eating could mean eating:

- Whole grains instead of refined grains such as white flour whenever possible.
- Fruits, vegetables, and beans to provide the fiber and vitamins they contain.
Meat is on the whole foods healthy list. A skinless chicken breast cooked with healthy vegetables and nuts instead of chicken nuggets processed with added fats, flavorings, and preservatives.

You can have a baked potato with chopped green onions and light sour cream in place of a bag of sour cream and onion flavored potato chips.

Top your whole grain oatmeal with fresh berries for breakfast instead of having a toaster pastry or processed breakfast bar.

Favoring a whole foods diet means choosing foods that are natural and can be prepared at home with real cooking. It’s food that can be grown in your garden, purchased at a local farmer’s market or in the outer aisles of your supermarket.

**Benefits of eating whole foods**

Okay. Now that you know what a whole food eating style is, you might be wondering why you’d benefit from eating this way. After all, it’s faster, easier and maybe cheaper just to grab the prepackaged, pre-cooked processed stuff, right? The whole foods way of eating has many benefits.

- Eating Healthy Makes You Feel Better About Yourself
• Processed foods and fast food or convenience store foods are limited in variety and have a huge laundry list of ingredients that you might not even be able to pronounce. They might taste good, but they won’t keep you satisfied. Whole foods, on the other hand, will fill you up and keep you satisfied longer.

• Fruits and vegetables are packed with nutrition, vitamins, minerals and fiber. They are low in calories so you can maintain a healthy weight without having to worry about counting calories. Whole grains paired with fresh fruits and vegetables are a delicious meal or dessert.

• Eating whole foods provides a decrease in heart disease. Consuming a high fiber, whole foods diet protects your heart from cardiovascular disease. While whole grains are rich in fiber, raw fruits and vegetables such as carrots or greens are a good source of fiber as well.

• Moving to a diet high in whole foods such as fruits, vegetables and grains might lower your risk of developing type 2 diabetes and the problems associated with the disease. A high raw vegan diet can help you manage your blood sugar. One way to do this is to have a big smoothie made from fibrous fruits and veggies every day.

• The whole foods way of eating can help you reverse some types of diseases. Many people have had success reversing heart disease, diabetes and some types of cancer.

The whole foods healthy eating plan has many benefits. It provides you with the nutrients needed for a healthy body, helps you fight off diseases and maintain your weight.

**What are micronutrients and why you need them?**

Your body needs certain vitamins, minerals and nutrients to stay healthy and grow. What exactly are they and why do you need them?

According to the CDC, “Micronutrients are dietary components, often referred to as vitamins and minerals, which although only required by the body in small amounts, are vital to development, disease prevention, and well-being. Micronutrients are not produced in the body and must be derived from the diet. (source)

Micronutrients include such minerals as fluoride, selenium, sodium, iodine, copper and zinc, as well as vitamins such as vitamin C, A, D, E and K, and also the B-complex vitamins.

When there are deficiencies in micronutrients such as iron, iodine, vitamin A, folate and zinc, it can have devastating consequences on a person’s health.
For example, iron is an essential mineral. It is critical for motor and cognitive development. Children and pregnant women are very vulnerable to the consequences of iron deficiency.

Another example is Zinc. This mineral promotes healthy immunity, resistance to infection, and proper growth and development of the nervous system.

Micronutrients are needed in very tiny amounts. These substances have been called magic wands because they help the body to produce the enzymes, hormones and other substance needed for proper growth and development.

Problems with processed foods
If you’re like the majority of people, you’ve had some type of processed food at one time or another. Maybe it was a quick trip through the local fast food restaurant. Or maybe it was a prepackaged dinner when you were in a hurry or just too tired to cook.

Processed foods were once thought to be a healthy alternative. The manufacturers still claim they are healthy, siting claims like low fat, low carb, vitamin fortified, no trans-fat, contains omega-3s. These foods are actually what are making a lot of people fat, sick and unhealthy instead.

Coronary heart disease, diabetes, stroke and cancer – four of the top ten chronic diseases that kill most of us have all been linked to processed food consumption.

According to the Nurses’ Health Study, Nurses’ Health Study II, and the Health Professionals Follow-up Study, the largest, most extensive studies ever conducted on health and nutrition, the foods that contributed the most to weight gain are French fries, potato chips, sugar-sweetened drinks, red meats and processed meats, sweets and desserts, refined grains, fried foods, 100-percent fruit juice, and butter (these results were published in June 2011 in the New England Journal of Medicine).

Some of the problems with processed food include:

- Processed food-like substances are designed to never rot, expire or go bad. Do you really want that in your body?
- The processed food industry over-seasons its food with way too much salt, sugar, and oil.
- White bread or white pasta is made with white flour, a highly processed version of wheat. This means you are eating empty calories that have far less nutrition than the whole-wheat or whole grain alternatives.
- An estimated 90% of processed foods in supermarkets are made with either a corn or soy ingredient in the form of an additive. These are all under a variety of different names.
- They are loaded with ingredients that you can’t pronounce.

Eliminating processed foods helps you have more energy, lose weight and feel healthier. And by cutting out processed foods, you don’t have to count calories, watch fat grams or even eat a very low carb diet. You know what you’re eating when you eat a whole foods diet.

Doesn’t that make more sense?
A whole foods eating plan helps you manage your weight by including a variety of foods. You might be surprised by how these foods will fill you up and keep you from craving processed foods.

- **Fruits.** Go beyond apples and bananas. Any fresh fruit is a great choice. Try some of the more “exotic” fruits such as mangos or yellow honeydew. Pineapples are just as good fresh in a salad or cooked on the grill. When fruit isn’t in season you can try frozen or canned. Be careful though, many contain added sugar or syrups. Look for ones packed in water or their own juice.

- **Fresh vegetables.** Get creative here and try something new. Try grilling a variety of vegetables or steaming them with fresh herbs like rosemary or thyme. Panfry or sauté vegetables in a non-stick pan with a small amount of cooking spray. Again, try frozen or canned when your favorites aren’t in season. Look for ones with no added salt, cream sauce or butter.
• Calcium-rich foods. These can include low-fat or fat-free milk and yogurt. Low fat real cheeses are a good source of calcium. Another option to replace dairy is soy or almond milk.

• Whole grains. Pick up whole grains in the bulk foods aisle. Oats, nuts, seeds, brown rice, rye, millet, quinoa, and cornmeal are good choices to have on hand. If you don’t like soaking beans, opt for canned ones instead.

• Beans and legumes. These include lentils, chickpeas and kidney beans.

• Lean meat. This includes poultry, lean beef, lamb and pork, fresh fish and seafood. Avoid processed meats like bologna and hot dogs.

• Free range eggs. These eggs are raised outside and eat a variety of natural foods instead of being caged and fed meat by-products or grains alone.

• Coconut oil. Olive oil. Butter.

• Seasonings and herbs.

• Snacks can include fruits, vegetables, cheese, hard-boiled eggs, beef jerky, cashew butter, nuts and dried fruits.

• Cocoa powder, unsweetened, and honey mixed with fruit can satisfy a sweet tooth.

The variety of foods you can eat in a whole foods plan is unlimited. It includes foods that are in their most natural state and unprocessed. Have fun trying new fruits, vegetables and meats in unlimited recipes.

**Avoiding extremism…don’t label natural foods as bad.**

Like any type of eating, it can be taken to the extreme. When you start limiting what whole foods you can eat as bad, you begin to lose some of the health benefits of those foods.

Here are some of the more common extreme whole foods diets.

**“Whole 30” program.** This style of eating doesn’t allow grains or any sugars. That means bananas, whole wheat, oats and peanut butter are off limits, and eliminating all traces of dairy, sugar and legumes for 30 whole days. The diet is strict and eliminates many foods that contain essential nutrients.

**Low carb/High Fat or Atkins.** On this plan you eat 20 net grams or less of carbohydrates like fruit, bread and grains while eating bacon, eggs and other high fat foods. Eliminating carbs can lead to disordered eating, like Orthorexia nervosa.
Orthorexia nervosa disorder is characterized by excessive preoccupation of avoiding foods believed to be unhealthy. In severe cases it can lead to malnutrition or death. In less severe cases the attempt to follow a strict type of diet that doesn't provide adequate nourishment can lower self-esteem since orthorexics blame themselves for their constant hunger and cravings for forbidden food.

**Paleo diet.** This plan is based on how our ancestors ate. It eliminates grains, dairy and processed foods allowing for meat, fish, vegetables and fruit. The difference between a whole foods eating plan and a Paleo diet is the absence of grains and dairy. Whole grains and legumes are good sources of fiber, vitamins and other nutrients. Dairy products are good sources of protein and calcium.

Avoiding going to the extreme on a whole foods eating plan simply means including all the food categories in moderation.

**6 Ways to Add Whole Foods to Your Diet**

So just how do you go about getting more whole foods in your diet? Here are six simple steps to take:

1. Opt for products with 100% whole grains whenever possible.
2. When baking, replace half the white flour called for with whole-wheat flour. Use half the amount of sweetener whenever possible, as well.
3. Load up on fresh fruits and vegetables. Include them in almost every meal and snack.
4. Include beans in your meals and snacks regularly.
5. Cut back on convenience and processed foods. They're loaded with added fat, sugar, salt, and additives.
6. Drink non-sugary beverages, such as water, mineral water, green tea (iced or hot), fresh fruit juice, and skim or soy milk.
Now that you have an idea of what a whole foods lifestyle is and what you should be eating, you might be a bit overwhelmed. It might seem like you are going to be cooking and shopping all the time. That’s not true.

Here are tips for shopping and preparing whole foods.

**Shopping**

1. Create a meal plan for the week. Include foods that are in season and on sale.
2. Create a shopping list and visit local farmers and farmer’s markets to get the freshest foods.
3. Load up on staples such as beans, grains and nuts. Keep dry pasta, honey and oats on hand for quick meals or desserts.
4. Shop the perimeter of the store. Most of the whole foods will be located here with a few exceptions like whole-wheat flour and brown rice.
5. Buy organic whenever possible, especially in the produce aisle.
6. Shop the frozen foods section for produce that’s out of season. Stock up on vegetables and fruit that have been packed fresh without sauces, butter or salt added.

7. Fresh seafood should be wild-caught over farmed.

8. Choose grass-fed humanely raised beef whenever possible.

9. Avoid items like bread that lists wheat or enriched wheat as the main ingredient. Sandwich bread that is made with 100% whole-wheat can be hard to find in supermarkets, so this might be something you consider making yourself or getting from a local bakery.

10. Choose products that don’t have an ingredient list or have a short list of easily recognizable ingredients.

Budgeting

1. Buy bulk products online if your local store doesn’t carry ingredients like whole-grain flours, coconut oil or raw nuts. Oftentimes buying online can be cheaper than going to a specialty health food store.

2. Stock up on products from farmer’s markets. You can preserve or freeze them to use later.

3. Grow your own produce or raise your own chickens for the meat or eggs.

4. Buy only what you can use within a week if you aren’t going to be freezing or preserving it. This is especially important for produce and meat.

Preparation

Cooking real food can take up a lot of time. With a little advance planning you can eliminate some of the steps.

- Pre-chop vegetables such as onions and peppers so they are ready to add to your recipe.

- Create 2-for-1 meals. For example, when cooking a casserole for dinner, cook two and freeze one for a later meal.

- Batch cook and freeze meals ahead of time. You can do this for a week’s worth of meals, or do up to a month’s worth of meals. Basically what you do is prepare all your ingredients, mix and cook the recipes, and then freeze. Label everything. Casseroles can be cooked in disposable pans.

Eating the healthy whole foods way doesn’t have to add more stress to your already busy schedule.
What you should do now?

Now that you know how healthy eating whole foods is for you, you are ready to jump in and go shopping. It’s time to start cooking some delicious meals. With all the fresh foods available you can get really creative with your meals. If you don’t have an arsenal of recipes to choose from, go online and do a search for whole foods cooking or real food recipes. You’ll find everything from breakfast sausage to quinoa side dishes to steak dinners to desserts made with fresh fruits.

How do you make eating whole foods a habit?

Begin by thinking about your reasons for starting this eating plan. Do you want to improve your health? Do you want to feel better? Are you trying to set an example for your kids?

Next, what small changes you can make? Pick ones you can keep doing, like adding more vegetables to your plate.

Don’t try to change everything at once. This will just cause you to stress about it.

Set one easy goal at a time you can reach, like having a salad and a piece of fruit each day.

Finally, set a long-term goal, too. This can be as simple as having one vegetarian dinner a week.

Is raw foods the same as eating whole foods?

No. The raw foods diet is means food is eaten only in its natural state. So fruits and vegetables are eaten raw, never steamed or cooked. While the whole foods eating plan does call for eating raw fruits and vegetables often, it also promotes cooking them in healthy ways such as soups, sautés and roasting.

There you have it. Eating healthy whole foods is not a fad and there are no banned real foods.