

Cultures of Gender and Age

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Academy of Nutrition
and Dietetics

Cultures of Gender and Age (COGA)

Member Interest Group of the
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Food Cults – Where Science and Skepticism Collide

Closing the Gap Between Nutrition Knowledge and Food Beliefs



Presented on August 22, 2018

by

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Bradley Beach, NJ**

Disclosures

- **Member of the L.E.A.D. Network
(Leaders Engaged in Advancing Dialogue)
sponsored by Monsanto**
- **Scientific Advisor to the Calorie Control Council**

Biases

I believe

- any food can be part of a balanced diet
- the amount and frequency of what we eat determines the benefit of our food choices, not individual foods
- a plant-based diet is best for people and the planet

Objectives

- **Identify the social, political and economic conditions that give rise to food cults**
- **Examine how food cults have impacted food policy contrary to available scientific evidence**
- **Demonstrate how the ideology of a food cult can be used to achieve goals for optimal nutrition for the population at large**

Eating behavior is irrational

THE ALLURE OF FOOD CULTS AND NUTRITION QUACKERY

by Hilde Bruch, M.D.

The allure of quackery and cults has such complex and deep-reaching roots that it is impossible to discuss more than a few general points in a brief paper. The question of why people turn to quackery instead of to the legitimate health profession can also not be understood in isolation. It is not sufficient, as is frequently done, to denounce the victims of quackery as uneducated, ignorant, superstitious, and gullible, as seekers of magical cures who want something for nothing in a quick and easy way. All these features play a role, but focusing on them alone offers no basis for correcting the state of affairs. Such behavior, unreasonable and wasteful as it appears to be, must also be listened to for the message it conveys, namely, that in some important aspects, our rational scientific approach fails to fulfill the desperate needs of suffering people, and it is to these needs that quacks and cultists address themselves.

There is need to recognize the victims' own contributions: the denial of illness, the uncritical belief in bizarre and unrealistic promises, and the deep-seated mistrust of the medical profession and its methods of treatment. The problem must also be examined against the background of the whole social climate, the model of health education, and health care and its delivery. The sales pitch of the promoters would not make customers for quackery and food fads if there were not people with unfulfilled needs, and if the merchandise, worthless as it is from a naturalistic, scientific point of view, did not give some relief, however temporary or imaginary, namely by offering hope where there had been despair and nihilism.

The Desperate Hunt for Healing

The well known writer, John Gunther, gives a dramatic account of this fight

Dr. Bruch is Professor of Psychiatry, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas.

Reprinted from the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, 57: 316, 1970

against extinction in his book, *Death Be Not Proud*,¹ the true story of his son's fight against brain cancer, at the age of sixteen. This intelligent, sophisticated, and well informed family used the best neurologists and brain surgeons in a renowned medical center and, at the same time, turned to whatever hearsay remedy seemed available, including health foods, vegetable juices, freshly squeezed juice of calves liver, and so on. Though there were intervals of seeming improvement, the family had been told that there was no hope, and thus they felt compelled to try everything. In their desperate efforts to save the boy, they felt they could not leave any stone unturned, any possibility untried. The physicians did not object to this family's switching, in its agony, back and forth from quack to university hospital, as if they acknowledged that there was some benefit in these activities.

Fictional examples are to be found in a novel, *Cancer Ward* by Solzhenitsyn,² of how potentially everybody – regardless of education, intelligence, and background – when desperate and confronted with the danger of death, may come to believe in or hope for miracle drugs and secret formulas, or special herbs and foods. It offers a moving portrayal of a group of men of the greatest diversity of background, each an individual in his own distinct way, who face the terror of decay, suffering, and death in utter loneliness, though living and sleeping side by side in the same ward.

Not this but a new kind of isolation is meant.

Dr. Bruch is Professor of Psychiatry, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas.

Reprinted from the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, 57: 316, 1970

“...our rational scientific approach fails to fulfill the desperate needs of suffering people, and it is to these needs that quacks and cultists address themselves.”

No human society deals rationally with food



Victims of quackery are often anxious about the uncertainties of life
and the threats to their well-being.

Promoters of food cults offer them solutions.

The many food rituals and taboos around the world
also address these fears.



Eating behavior is irrational,
no human society
deals rationally with food, and
there is no place in the world where
people eat everything edible that is
available to them.

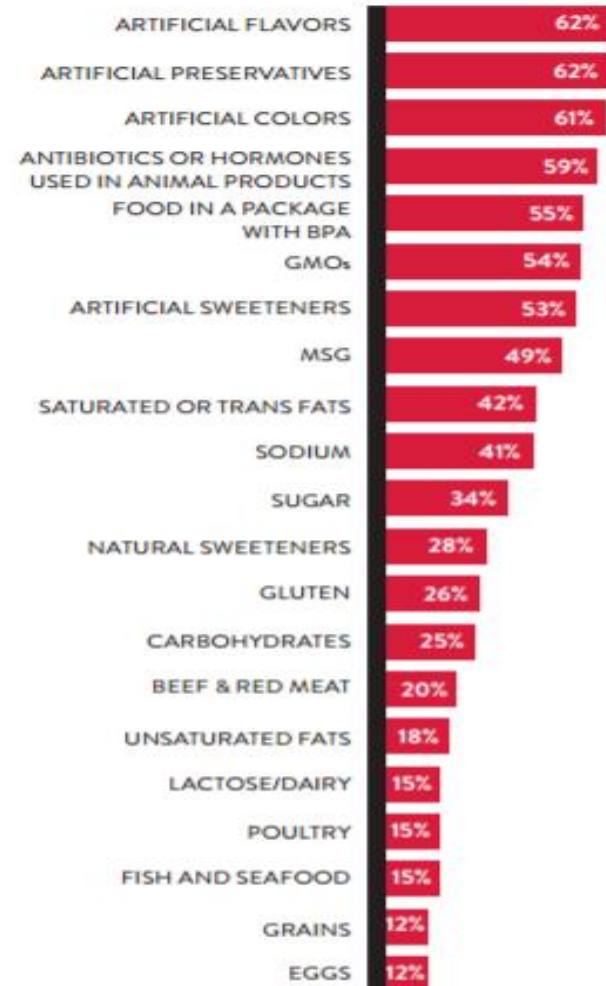
64% of people worldwide follow a diet that prohibits certain ingredients or foods



The Nielsen Global Health and Ingredient-Sentiment Survey, Q1 2016

AVOIDING ARTIFICIAL INGREDIENTS TOPS THE GLOBAL LIST

GLOBAL AVERAGE: PERCENTAGE WHO SAY THEY TRY TO AVOID SPECIFIED INGREDIENT OR ATTRIBUTE



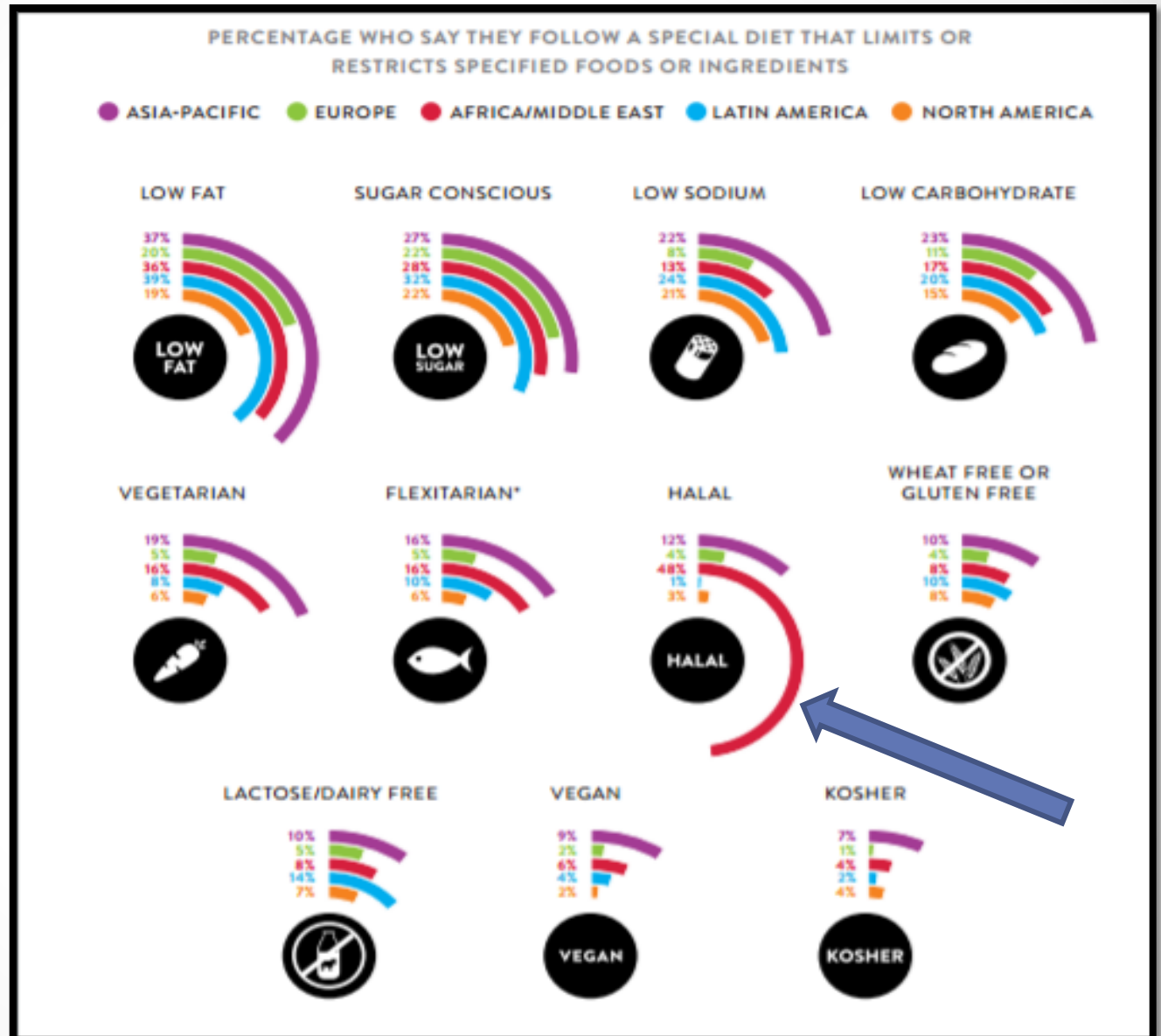
Diet restrictions are observed around the globe

Percentage of population following special diets:

84% in Africa, Middle East and Asia-Pacific

37% in France, Spain and Italy

50% in North America





Pleasure vs Health contributes to the rise in food cults

Cultures that place a high value on the pleasure of eating are less susceptible to food cults, but when eating is more closely tied to health and disease, people are likely to experience more food anxiety and consequently be more vulnerable to food cults.

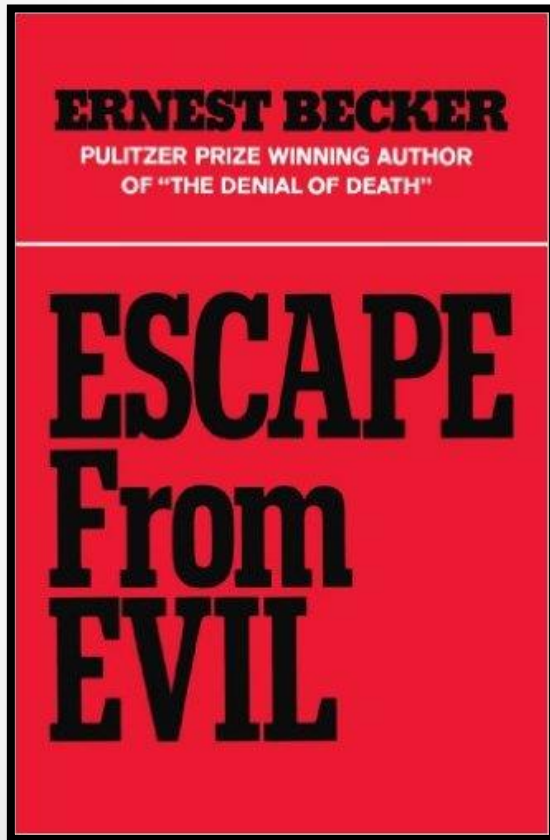
Harvey Levenstein, Food Historian



University of Chicago Press, 2012



The link between eating and death contributes to food cults



Free Press, 1975

Behind every act of eating is the disturbing connection to death

Eating is a magical ritual where life is transmitted from one object to another

The rituals, symbols and meanings behind food arose as a way to forget about death

The desire for more life – or to become immortal - allowed 'Food Cultures' to emerge

The Omnivore's Dilemma contributes to food cults

“Neophilia vs Neophobia”

Desire to try new foods vs Fear of eating something toxic



Advances in the Study of Behavior

Volume 6, 1976, Pages 21–76



The Selection of Foods by Rats, Humans, and Other Animals

Paul Rozin

**The Meaning of Food in Our Lives:
A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Eating and Well-Being**

PAUL ROZIN, PHD

Department of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior
Volume 37, 2005, Pages S107-S112



The world is populated by
over 7 billion people
who each had to learn
what and how to eat to survive,
and we aren't all doing it
the same way



Food cults relieve fears and anxiety which are often a metaphor for other concerns

- **Mistrust of government institutions**
- **Loss of integrity in the scientific community**
- **Corporate greed**
- **Industrial conspiracies**
- **Economic insecurity**
- **Shifts in political power**

These concerns are now
a permanent condition of modern life

Features of food cults

- ❑ **Becomes a central organizer of one's identity**
- ❑ **Revolves around a group dogma or ideology**
- ❑ **Involves an immersion experience, usually achieved through sacrifice or deprivation**
- ❑ **Follows a charismatic leader or “guru”**
- ❑ **Includes special rules, rituals and practices**
- ❑ **Shares a community of worship (increasingly online)**

Food cults vs fad diets and mental illness

- **Food cults are social communities built around a food ideology that promises relief from fear and anxiety**
- **Fad diets are started impulsively and are short-lived, often to lose weight, offering less structure and community**
- **Orthorexia is a solitary effort by someone with a genetic predisposition to obsessive compulsive disorder to find the 'perfect diet'**

Jackson P. *Anxious Appetites*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015

Levenstein H. *Fear of Food*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012

Mathieu, J. What is orthorexia? *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2005;105(10):1510-1512

Cults tell us everything we need to know



Promote a binary way of thinking about food as “good” or “bad”

Can use food labels to find the bad ingredients or Nutrition Facts

Right choices save you from the dangers of the marketplace

Do not consider the synergy of foods or other dietary patterns

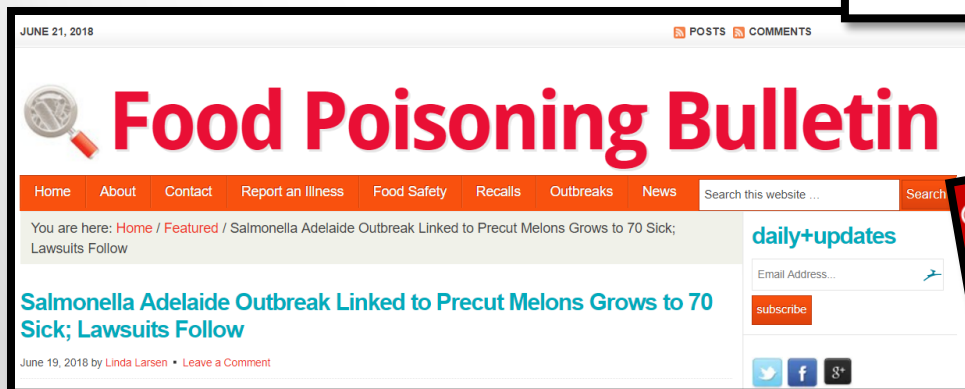
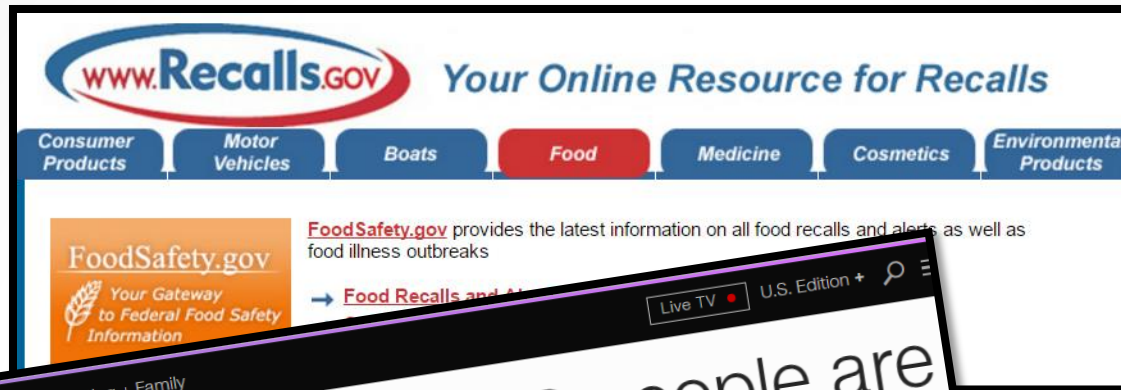
Objective #1

Identify the social, political and economic conditions that give rise to food cults today

What triggers a rise in food cults?

- 1. Food Scares and Recalls**
- 2. Threats to National Security**
- 3. Refuted Research**
- 4. Emphasis on Disease Prevention**
- 5. Public Health Campaigns**
- 6. Mass Media and Celebrity Hype**

1. Food Scares and Recalls



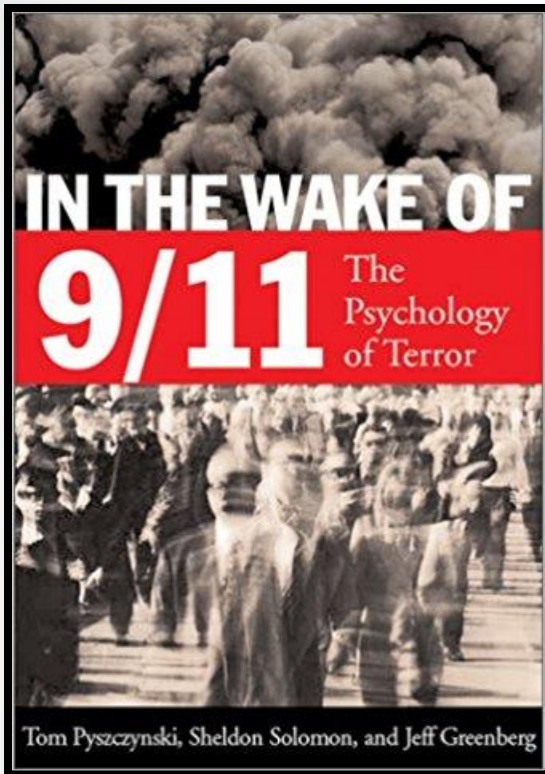
Where can we turn when food is tainted?

Cults focused on:

- **Vegetarianism**
- **Organically grown**
- **Unprocessed food**
- **Juicing**
- **Fasting**
- **Detoxing**
- **Cleanses**

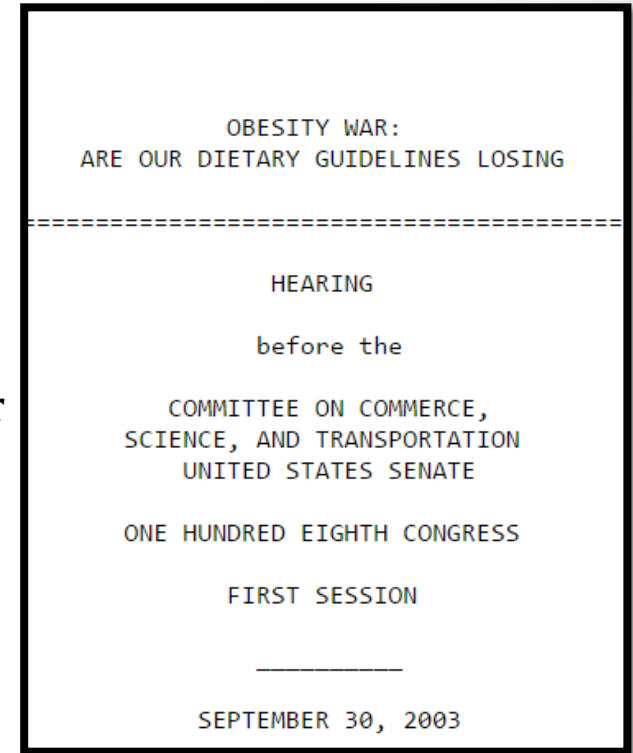


2. Threats to National Security



American Psychological Association, 2003

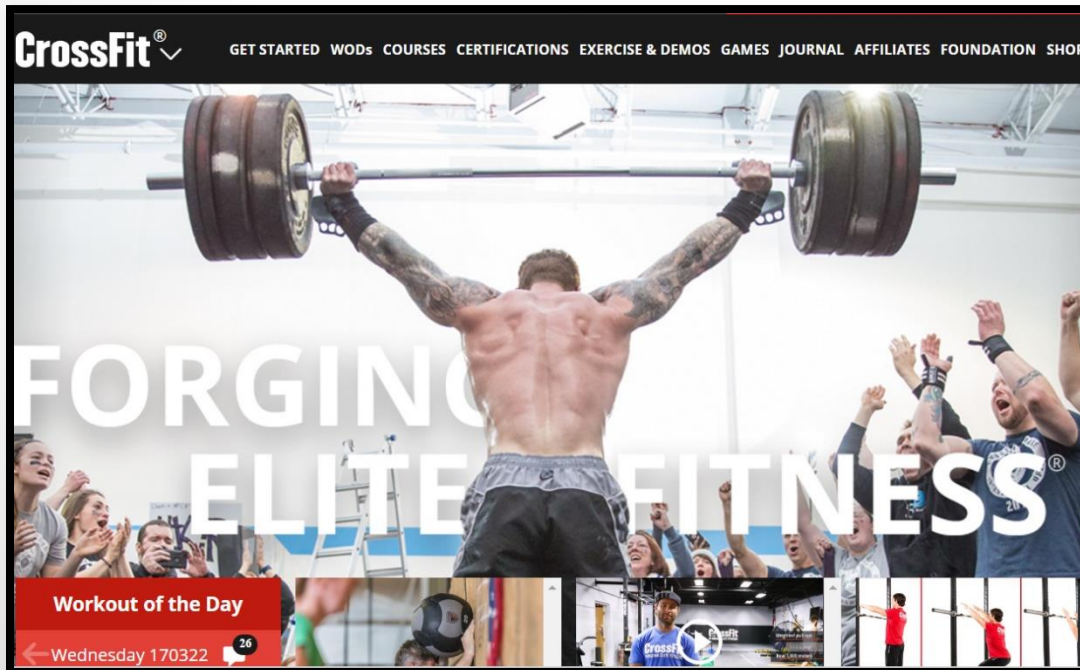
In the anxiety about terrorism following the 9/11 attacks and the 2003 U.S. Senate Hearing, “Obesity War: Are Our Dietary Guidelines Losing” the lines between civilian and soldier became blurred



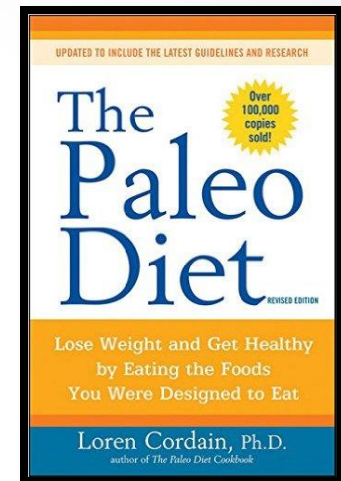
Charlotte Biltekoff,
Eating In America: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health, Duke Univ. Press. 2013

Build a better body

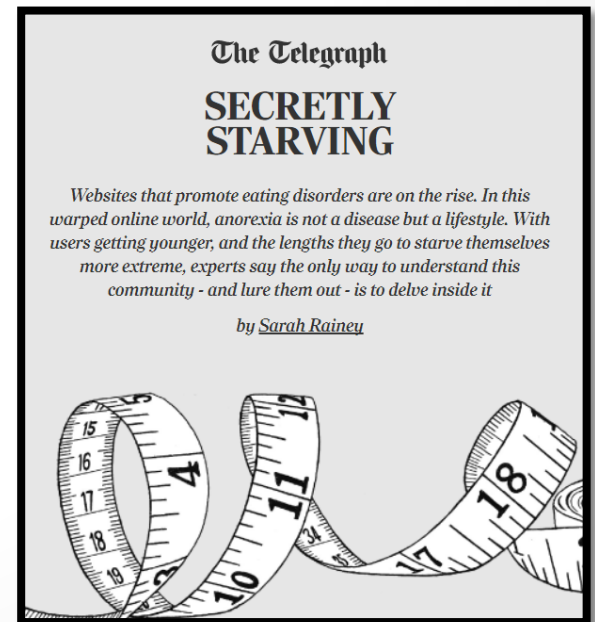
A heightened sense of one's mortality prompts an increased level of control over the body, seen in paramilitary-style fitness regimes and restrictions on diet from eating only pre-agricultural foods to starvation



<https://www.crossfit.com/>



John Wiley & Sons, 2002

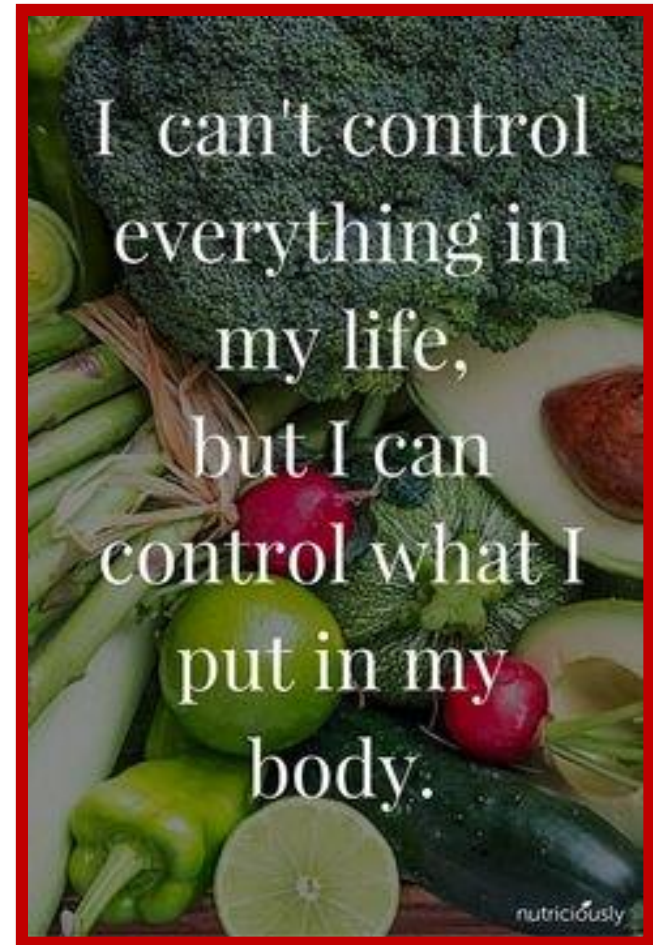


<http://bit.ly/1y2kDd0>

How can we defend our nation?

Cults that focus on:

- **Paramilitary fitness regimes**
- **Paleo/Caveman/Primal diets**
- **Eating disorders**
- **Localist Movement**
- **Raw foods**



3. Refuted Research

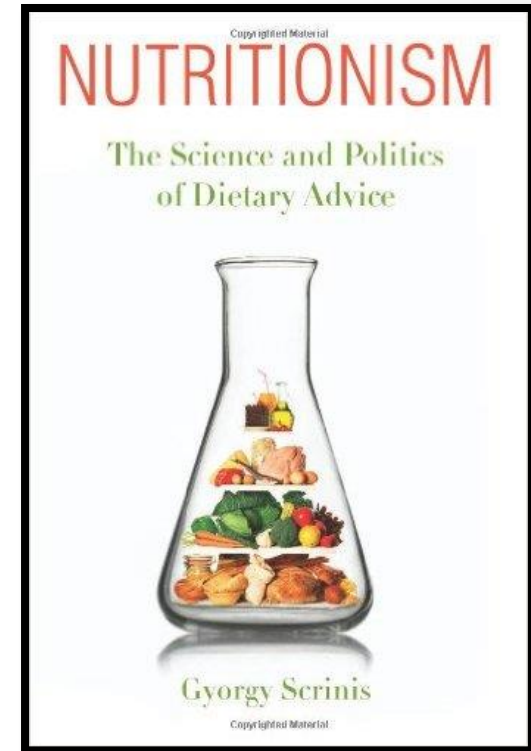
Pseudoscientists imitate the style of legitimate scientists by citing studies and using statistics and graphs to prove their point. Then they offer definitive advice about what to eat, while recommendations from health professionals are more complicated and conditional.



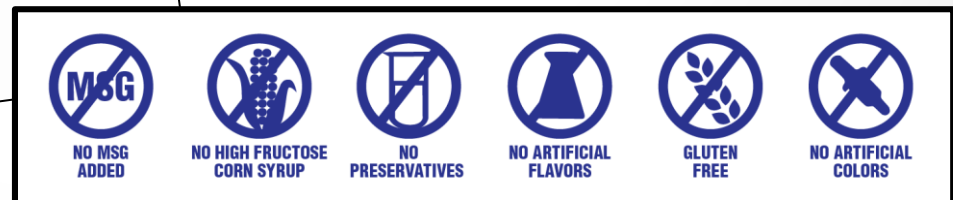
Seek simplicity when science fails you

Cults that focus on:

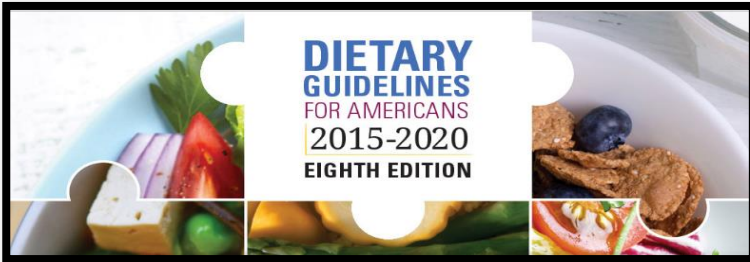
- **Nutritionism**
- **Healthism**
- **“Free-From” claims**
- **Superfoods**
- **Dietary supplements**
- **Functional foods**



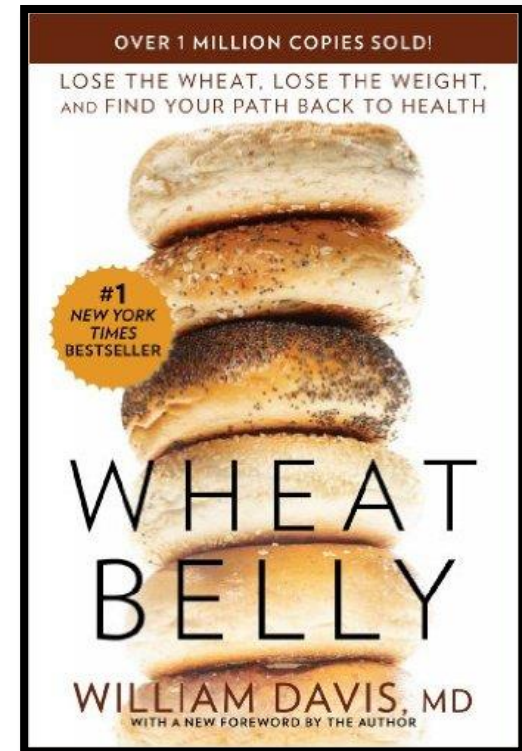
Columbia University Press, 2013



How cults make the right choice seem simple



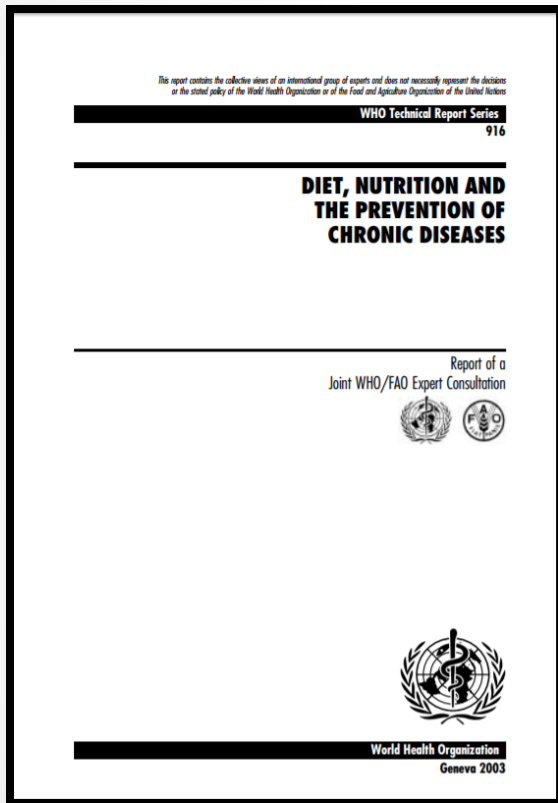
“Focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount. To meet nutrient needs within calorie limits, choose a variety of nutrient-dense foods across and within all food groups in recommended amounts.”



Rodale Books, 2011

“Do not eat wheat”

4. Disease Prevention



Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation on Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases
Geneva, Switzerland, 2002

Circulation

AHA/ACC PREVENTION GUIDELINE

2013 AHA/ACC Guideline on Lifestyle Management to Reduce Cardiovascular Risk

A Report of the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association Task Force on Practice Guidelines

CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians



[Explore this journal >](#)

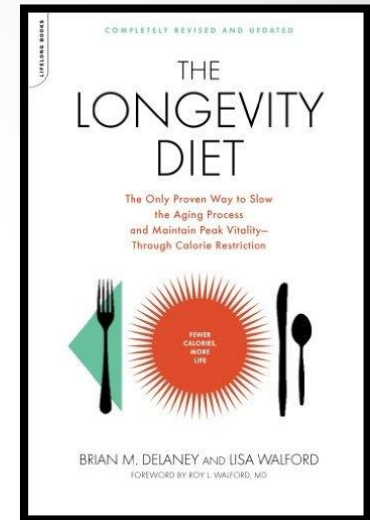
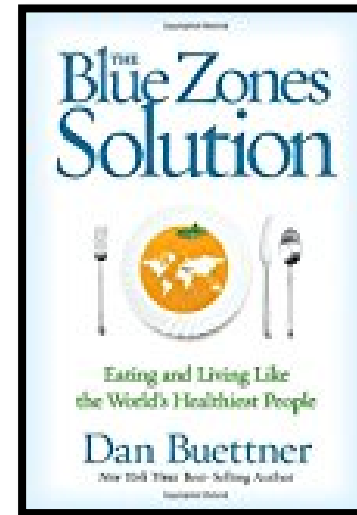
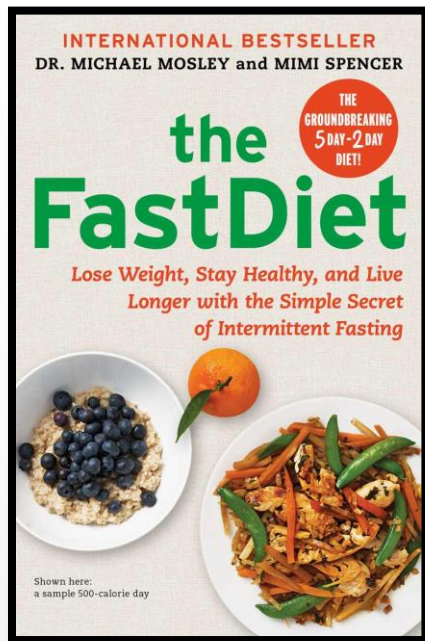
Article

American Cancer Society guidelines on nutrition and physical activity for cancer prevention^{†‡}

Reducing the risk of cancer with healthy food choices and physical activity

Eat less food to the rescue

- Longevity Cults
- Intermittent Fasting
- Single/Mono Food Cults
- Limited Food Groups



5. Public Health Campaigns



Food safety messages
increase concerns about
life threatening
bacterial contamination
of the food supply

Clean living to the rescue!

- Clean eating
- Clean labels
- All natural
- No Preservatives
- Antibiotic-free
- Pesticide free
- Hormone free



6. Mass Media and Celebrity Hype

When there is a loss of a cultural authority – a clear, unequivocal, centrally constructed, and widely accepted view of reality – the void must be filled.

“Extremists in academia”

“Arbitrary regulators at the FDA”

“ZEALOTS AT THE FTC”

“Hypocritical opportunists in industry”

“Ill-informed scientists”

“Ideological liberal in Congress”

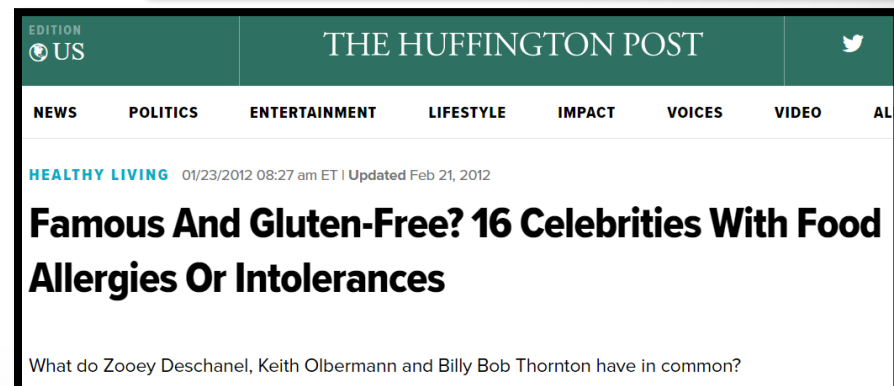
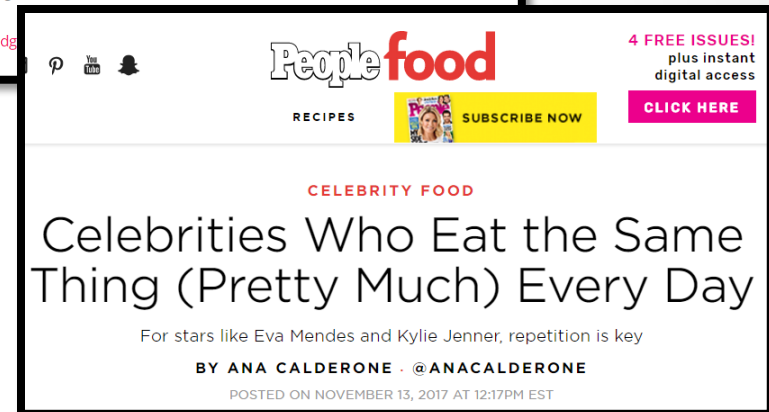
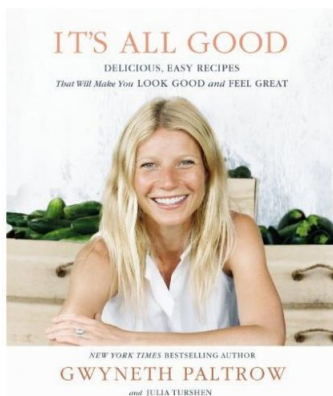
“Huckster physicians”

Where to turn when there are no experts?

- **Gluten Free**
- **Non-GMO**
- **No Added Sugar**
- **No Artificial Sweeteners**

List of things you CAN'T eat in Gwyneth Paltrow's new elimination diet cookbook "It's All Good"

JAN. 6, 2013 | 1:44 PM | Author: STARCASM STAFF | Categories: CELEBRITY COOKBOOK, DIETS, GWYNETH PALTROW



Objective #2

...

Examine how food cults
have impacted food policy
contrary to available scientific evidence



Consumer perceptions drive changes in the food industry



BEYOND THE LABEL ABOUT THE STUDY ②

About the Study

Beyond The Label is a comprehensive study on the clean food revolution in America.

This study is one component of Kerry's strategic emphasis on consumer expectations in taste and nutrition. Our research focused on how consumer perceptions can inform the manufacturing, retail, and foodservice industries in an effort to understand the future of food and beverages.

We asked over seven hundred American consumers who read the ingredient label to share their opinions on grocery shopping, food consumption, and product packaging in an online survey. The survey employed a mix of quantitative and qualitative research techniques to explore consumers' understanding of Clean Label and how specific claims, ingredients, and packaging influence their purchase decisions. The result is a unique and actionable definition of Clean Label and an understanding of what consumers want and don't want in their food.

“Our research focused on how consumer perceptions can inform the manufacturing, retail, and foodservice industries in an effort to understand the future of foods and beverages.”

Untested replacement ingredients are used



FREE FROM 101

IN OUR STORES

**FREE
FROM
101**



Just look for the tag in store.

Just look for the tag!

Free From 101 designates the product is free from one hundred and one artificial preservatives and ingredients.

Listed below are the ingredients that you won't find in any of the products identified as Free From 101.

Acesulfame-K (acesulfame potassium)	Dimethylpolysiloxane	Potassium hydroxide
Acetylated ester of mono- and diglycerides	Dioctyl sodium sulfosuccinate (DSS)	Potassium metabisulfite
Ammonium chloride	Disodium calcium EDTA	Potassium nitrate or nitrite
Antibiotics	Disodium dihydrogen EDTA	Potassium sorbate (acceptable in supplements)
Artificial colors (Synthetic and FD&C Certified)	Disodium guanylate (GMP)	Propionates (calcium and sodium)
	Disodium succinate	Propyl gallate
	DMAA	Propylene oxide
	EDTA-ethylenediamine-tetra acetic acid-chelating preservative	Propylparaben
	Erythorbic acid	Saccharin
	Ester gums	Simplesse
	Ethanol, ethyl alcohol, except that which is used as a natural flavor carrier	Sodium aluminum phosphate
	Ethyl vanillin	Sodium aluminum sulfate
	Ethylene oxide	Sodium benzoate
	Ethoxyquin	Sodium bisulfate
	FD&C colors (food dye & color)	Sodium diacetate
	Glycerol ester of wood rosin	Sodium ferrocyanide
	Hexa-, hepta- and octa-esters of sucrose	Sodium glutamate
	High-fructose corn syrup	Sodium metabisulfite
	Hydrogenated/partially hydrogenated fats & oils	Sodium nitrate/nitrite
	Hydroxypropyl guar gum	Sodium propionate
	Methylene chloride	Sodium steryl lactylate
	Methyl silicon	Sodium steryl-2-lactylate
	Modified food starch (acceptable if not chemically modified)	Sodium sulfite
	Monoglycerides	Solvent extracted oils, as stand-alone, single-ingredient oils (except grapeseed oil)
	Monosodium glutamate (MSG)	Sorbic acid
	Neotame	Sucralose
	Nitrates/nitrites	Sucroglycerides
	Oxystearin	Sucrose polyester (Olestra, Olean)
	Parabens	Sulfites (Sulfur dioxide), acceptable if naturally occurring, 3.g., vinegar
	Partially hydrogenated oil	Tartrazine
	Polydextrose	TBHQ (tertiary butylhydroquinone)
	Potassium benzoate	Tetrasodium EDTA
	Potassium bisulfate	Trans fatty acids
	Potassium bromate	Vanillin, Synthetic
Caprocaprylobehenin		
Carmine		
Certified colors		
Cochineal		
Cyclamates		
Cystine (l-cysteine), as an additive for bread products		
DATEM (diacetyl tartaric and fatty acid esters of mono and diglycerides)		
Diglycerides (acceptable in supplements)		



Low food quality is overlooked in favor of avoidance claims


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Fazoli's Announces Removal Of All Artificial Sweeteners, Flavors, Preservatives And Colors From Its Entire Food Menu



- America's Largest Fast Casual Italian Franchise is the 1st National Brand Under 1,000 Units to Unveil Completely Clean Food Menu -

NEWS PROVIDED BY
Fazoli's 
03 Apr, 2017, 10:26 ET

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Nutritional value is compromised when fortification is avoided

SPECIAL REPORT: Consumers and 'clean' food: Where is the clean label trend going next?



By Elaine Watson+

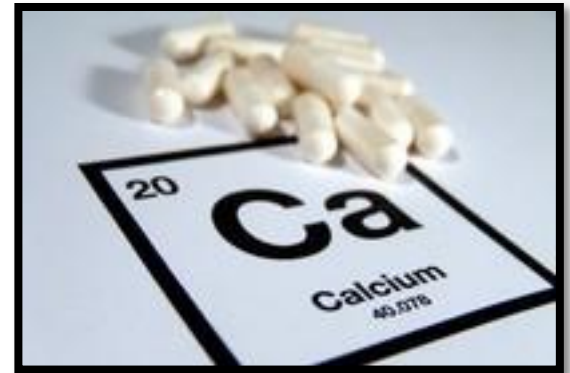
26-Apr-2017

Last updated on 27-Apr-2017 at 02:34 GMT

[Post a comment](#)

“Euromonitor has seen some manufacturers stop fortifying foods with minerals and vitamins – which often have long, unpronounceable names – in order to shorten ingredients lists and clean up labels... reflecting a growing suspicion of overly engineered food.”

Dr. Shelley Balanko, The Hartman Group





Misinformation breeds more mistrust

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SMARTNEWS

Keeping you current

Some Brands Are Labeling Products “GMO-free” Even if They Don’t Have Genes

More companies are paying to label their food as non-GMO, whether they need it or not.

By Danny Lewis, August 27, 2015. <http://bit.ly/2BLJ6fE>



Food costs go up with deceptive labels





Unnecessary diet changes can have unintended consequences

**American Heart Association**

**American Stroke Association**

EPI|LIFESTYLE 2017

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Session 5 - Dietary Patterns/Quality and Cardiovascular Health
11 - Associations of Gluten Intake With Type 2 Diabetes Risk and Weight Gain in Three Large Prospective Cohort Studies of US Men and Women

March 9, 2017, 8:30 - 8:45 AM

Grand Ballroom, Ballroom Level

The Telegraph

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Science

Science

Gluten-free con: 'Clean' foods are not as healthy as real thing, warn nutrition experts

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Gluten free food was found to contain far more fat and much less protein CREDIT: RAFAEL BEN-ARI / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

By Sarah Knapton, SCIENCE EDITOR
10 MAY 2017 - 11:00PM

ScienceDaily®

Your source for the latest research news

Science News

from research organizations

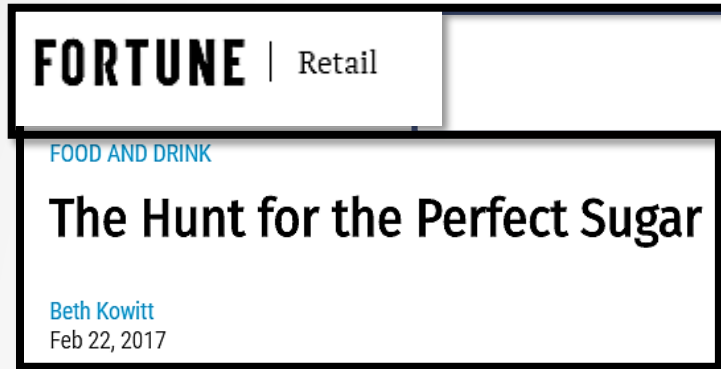
Gluten-free diet may increase risk of arsenic, mercury exposure

Date: February 13, 2017

Source: University of Illinois at Chicago

Summary: People who eat a gluten-free diet may be at risk for increased exposure to arsenic and mercury -- toxic metals that can lead to cardiovascular disease, cancer and neurological effects, according to a report in the journal Epidemiology.

Unrealistic expectations for a sweet & natural solution



74% of packaged foods and beverages in the U.S. contain some form of sweetener

Consumers view sugar as “natural,”
but not good for them,
yet will choose it over even small amounts of
artificial sweeteners

The food industry is expected to engineer a natural solution that
tastes sweet and has no calories or side effects –
which is an oxymoron

Demands for local food is at odds with food production and the environment



Tufts Health & Nutrition Letter, Contributor

A publication of the Friedman School of Nutrition Science & Policy at Tufts University

What's Your Dietary Footprint?

12/06/2016 01:18 pm ET | Updated Dec 07, 2016

The New York Times

Paying Farmers to Go Organic,
Even Before the Crops Come In

By STEPHANIE STROM JULY 14, 2016



11/06/2015

**Locally Sourced Foods Top
Forecast of 2016 Menu Trends**

Objective #3

...

**Demonstrate how the ideology of a food cult
can be used to achieve goals for
optimal nutrition for the population**



We have more in common with one another
about how we *feel* about eating
than what we actually eat



We don't have to eat the same foods
to reach the same goals

authentic

acceptance

reliable

transparency

natural

affordable

value

real

SAFE

FIND THE COMMON GROUND

trustworthy

SUSTAINABLE

pure

healthy

integrity

equitable

wholesome

compassionate

ETHICAL

honest

FIND THE COMMON GROUND

Concern about food coming from a globalized and complex food supply chain

Conversations

- ✓ Get to know the produce manager where you shop
- ✓ Visit a farmer's market to talk to growers
- ✓ Join a food cooperative for a share of locally grown crops
- ✓ Take a farm or factory tour

Questions

- ✓ What do they like to eat when they travel and why?
- ✓ How does the rest of the world view our food standards?
- ✓ What are their favorite brands and why?
- ✓ What builds your confidence in a product?

FIND THE COMMON GROUND

**Belief that nature & natural is better;
fear of 'technology' applied to food**

Conversations

- ✓ Compare food choices to those of our grandparents
- ✓ Discuss how they would select food if it had no labels
- ✓ Provide examples of how food processing helps them
- ✓ Talk about the technology behind grooming products

Questions

- ✓ Are there any risks in nature?
- ✓ Is all technology bad?
- ✓ Why is food technology harder to embrace?
- ✓ What is your definition of natural?

FIND THE COMMON GROUND

**Mistrust of growers, processors and retailers
who are in the business for profit**

Conversations

- ✓ Discuss how important reputation is to brands
- ✓ Share examples of how food scares affect the supply chain
- ✓ Explore motives of organic brands that make a profit
- ✓ Explain how organic & conventional food is inspected

Questions

- ✓ What types of processing makes food safer?
- ✓ Do you believe food is safer in other countries and why?
- ✓ Are some fresh foods safer than processed foods?
- ✓ How can consumers do more at home to keep their food safe?

FIND THE COMMON GROUND

Difficulty understanding scientific methods and risk/benefit analysis

Conversations

- ✓ Experts don't agree on everything, just the big things
- ✓ Positive choices can offset negatives ones
- ✓ All science is subject to change over time
- ✓ Discuss the difference between hazards, risks & exposure

Questions

- ✓ How often have you won the lottery?
- ✓ What is a safe dose and frequency of consumption?
- ✓ Do you know who to turn to for expert advice?
- ✓ Can you recognize the signs of quackery?

FIND THE COMMON GROUND

Make connections by learning
more about the cults

Cult focus

Dietary benefit

Juicing	➡	eating more fruits & vegetables
Paleo	➡	doing more home cooking
Raw Food	➡	eating more nuts & seeds
Nutritionism	➡	reading more food labels
Gluten-Free	➡	eating more ancient grains
Longevity	➡	monitoring caloric intake
Clean labels	➡	eating less processed food

The challenge for nutrition professionals

It is easier to
change a man's religion
than to change
his diet

~ Margaret Mead





The goal for nutrition professionals

Helping individuals
achieve and enjoy a
healthy lifestyle and
optimal dietary pattern
while respecting their beliefs



~ Robyn Flipse

Thank you!

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Q & A

CPE Certificate

If you are watching this presentation LIVE, you will receive your CPE certificate via email within 48 hours post webinar.

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