

Guidelines for Eating from Michael Pollan's "In Defence of Food"

Michael Pollan has made a career of food. No, he's not a chef. He's a writer. Pollan is the author of several books including his guide to eating, "In Defence of Food".

In the book, Pollan explores the roots of the Western diet and tries to answer the question: "If I have to eat differently, what should I eat?" Throughout the book he proposes a few simple rules by way of an answer.

1. Eat Food. Pollan is operating on the assumption that most of what is on supermarket shelves is not food, but is what he calls "food-like substitutes." Food, on the other hand, is just food—natural things that haven't been processed. He adds two helpful sub-rules: 1. Don't eat food your grandmother wouldn't recognize and 2. Don't eat things with ingredients in them you don't recognize (unfamiliar, unpronounceable, more than five in number, or containing high fructose corn syrup).

2. Shop the peripheries of the supermarket and stay out of the middle. Most supermarkets have their processed food in the aisles. When shopping, try to avoid the aisles. Stay around the edges where the fresh meats and produce are usually stocked and you will automatically avoid a lot of processed foods.

3. Shop outside of the supermarket whenever possible. "You won't find any high fructose corn syrup at a farmers market," Pollan says. The food at farmers markets is usually is better quality and richer in flavour and nutrients than food from supermarkets. When you shop at a farmer's market you can ask direct questions about the food from the people who grew it. Pollan has another pithy rule: Shake the hand that feeds you.

4. Eat mostly plants, especially leaves. Pollan isn't advocating vegetarianism, but simply that we eat less meat. When we eat plants we eat leaves or seeds. Seeds are everything that isn't a leaf; we need nutrients from both in balance. The Western diet is unbalanced towards seed nutrients because that's what our animals eat. Which brings us to the next rule.

5. You are what you eat eats too. If we eat an animal some of the nutrients from what the animal ate enter our body too. This may seem like common sense, but it is worth mentioning because our food system has separated the consumers of food from those who produce it by a long, complex chain. For most of us today food seems to have simply appear on supermarket shelves as if by magic. We could benefit by taking some time to think about the fact that what we are eating was once alive and asking ourselves questions about what kind of conditions it lived in.

6. Pay more, eat less. Better (healthier and more environmentally friendly) foods cost more. Less healthy foods cost less. That is part of the problem. Food grown in mass quantities is able to be sold at a cheaper price, but the cost is often in quality. Farmers' market foods often cost more and it is worth it.



7. Stop eating when you are 80% full. Studies have shown that people will eat what is before them and America's portions are huge. The feeling of fullness can sometimes be 20 minutes behind what you have actually eaten because it takes time for your brain and stomach to communicate, so to speak.

8. Eat meals. Americans often don't eat meals anymore. Meals, other than being one of the huge centerpieces of family and community for all of human history, generally cause people to eat more healthily and in lower quantities. Don't only eat meals, but eat them at home, with others. After you are done, don't get up for a while; just sit and have a conversation. In the best meals you aren't only feeding your body, but your relationships, your community and your soul.

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