

# Healthy Tips for Grocery Shopping: Michael Pollan's In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto

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**Shop the grocery store's perimeter, avoid products with lengthy ingredient lists and buy foods your great grandmother would recognize to attain a healthier lifestyle.**

In his treatise *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, esteemed journalist and author Michael Pollan scrutinizes what he refers to as "edible foodlike substances," the imposturous pseudo-foods that dominate supermarket shelves. As Pollan dispels some of the myths of nutritionism and unravels the curtain masking the food industry, he aims to reinstate the simplicity, joy and benefits of eating *good, genuine* food. Pollan's unifying premise in *In Defense of Food* is, "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants."

In addition to his deep insight into how the Western Diet—and particularly American's obsession with health and nutrients—has paradoxically lead to a decline in health, Pollan offers several basic tips for navigating the (increasingly complicated) grocery store to attain a more natural, balanced diet.

## **Whenever Possible, Skip the Grocery Store Altogether**

The easiest way to avoid the complicated labels, misleading health claims and the over-processed "foodlike substances" of the supermarket is to seek food elsewhere. Farmers' markets offer fresh whole foods picked at the peak of their flavor and nutritional quality. The foods present at farmers' markets are in season, helping to diversify your diet. Another alternative is to participate in a CSA (community-supported agriculture) program, in which a fresh box of locally grown produce is delivered periodically to your doorstep.

For those times when it's impractical to shop for food at a farmers' market or other local resource, here are a few guidelines for making good choices at the supermarket.

## **Shop Primarily on the Periphery of the Supermarket**

Most supermarkets have a similar layout: processed foods claim the center of the store, while more nutritious and fresh food such as produce, dairy and fish occupy the outer walls. On another note, most grocery stores place the most tempting (and usually least nutritious) options at eye-level on the shelves, whereas healthier options require bending and reaching to grab.

## **Avoid Foods with Complicated Labels and/or Health Claims**

Foods with ingredients that are virtually unpronounceable or unfamiliar tend to be equally unrecognizable to your body's digestive system. Avoid purchasing foods with more than five ingredients listed on the label, and steer away from products containing high-fructose corn syrup.

Additionally, don't be gulled by the heroic health claims many packaged foods boast; the FDA's ambivalent guidelines make many of these claims meaningless and often misleading. Furthermore, as Pollan points out, the FDA's rules don't limit or control company's promotion of their claims, meaning a claim may be printed in large, dominant type on the front of the package while crucial disclaimers are printed in illegibly small and obscure print.

## **Don't Eat Anything Your Great Grandmother Wouldn't Recognize as Food**

Pollan encourages readers to apply this rule while navigating the supermarket as another way of returning to real, actual food. Your great grandmother probably wouldn't recognize products whose ingredient lists are loaded with preservatives; similarly, Pollan points out that these products are foreign to your body. Chemical additives, artificial coloring and flavoring and synthetic sweeteners deceive your body, confounding the senses relied on to assess food and prepare the body accordingly.

## **A Simplified Approach to Healthy Foods**

Pollan's *In Defense of Food* is richly packed with reminders of how to avoid the commercial hype and dietary trends leaning

towards scientifically modified and processed products that are deplete of nutritional value, despite their claims. Instead, Pollan advocates a return to real, naturally grown and sustainable food that is unprocessed, wholesome, and even more satisfying in its simplicity.

**About Michael Pollan**

The author of several New York Times bestsellers, including *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *The Botany of Desire*, Michael Pollan is also a frequent contributor to *The New York Times Magazine*. Pollan is the Knight Professor of Journalism at Berkeley.

Source: Pollan, Michael. *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2008.