

WHOLE, FRESH, NATURAL FOODS

By reading through these definitions, you will soon learn to easily identify and distinguish between foods that are whole, fresh and natural compared to those that are processed. In a nutshell, the easiest way to know if a food is whole, fresh or natural is to ask yourself if you could find it out in nature. If you took a walk in the jungle or on a farm, would you see it? Have you ever heard of a Tator Tot tree or a bagel bush? If the answer is no, then it's a processed food. Basically, any food item that is not whole, fresh or natural is a processed food.

Whole

It is interesting to note, that the words wholeness and health have the same meaning and same root in the English language. Identifying a whole food is easy. Just think of any food that is completely intact just as Mother Nature made it. Any produce, such as apples, broccoli or potatoes, whole grains such as brown rice, millet or quinoa, vegetable proteins such as beans and legumes, animal proteins such as eggs, a piece of fish or meat. That's pretty much it, any food that is in its whole form containing all of its parts and nutrients. Any food that has been ground, separated, processed, refined and stripped of its parts and many, or all, of its valuable nutrients, would not be considered a whole food.

I frequently hear people say that they eat whole grains regularly because they buy whole wheat or whole grain bread. Certainly, whole grain bread is a better choice and may be closer to whole than white bread; but, don't be fooled into thinking you're eating whole grains. Bread is not a whole grain. It is bread. And bread is a processed food no matter how you slice it. It may be processed without chemical additives (check the label to be sure!); but it is processed nevertheless -- ground, baked, mixed with other ingredients, etc. Also, notice that I said it "may be closer to whole than white bread." A peek at the ingredients label of many types of bread, claiming a whole grain status, list white refined flour as the first ingredient. Many have added sugar as well. Mother Nature doesn't put labels on her foods. If a whole food happens to be packaged for convenience, the ingredients label will simply say "brown rice" for example (which is a whole grain, by the way); rather than a long list of words both mysterious and unpronounceable.

Fresh

The concept of fresh comes in a close second to the principle of whole, when it comes to simplicity. If food has been cooked, processed or preserved in any way, it is not fresh. Of course, there are degrees of freshness to consider as well. For example, produce trucked in from the farm to your local store is going to be less fresh than produce picked from your garden (which is as fresh as you can get!), but still much fresher than frozen, canned or dried produce. The same may be said of meats, poultry and dairy products.

Mother Nature has been very helpful to us by installing in her food products an automatic expiration date system. It's called rotting! Something that doesn't ever rot or takes a very long time to rot (except properly stored grains or legumes which have a naturally long shelf life) would obviously not be considered fresh and should be given at least a second thought before eating and preferably not considered at all.

The fresher food is, the more alive it is, which means the more enzymes and life-force energy it contains. Most Americans have a deficiency of vitamins, minerals and enzymes because they do not eat a large enough variety and quantity of fresh, raw fruits and vegetables. Enzymes are not only contained in fresh, living (raw) foods; but also produced in the body. The combination of the two sources of enzymes work together for proper digestion, assimilation and elimination of the foods you eat. Unfortunately, most Americans eat very little fresh, living food. Consequently, their body's digestive and metabolic enzyme stores are exhausted from consuming an excessive amount of cooked or processed (dead) food, which require double or more enzyme activity to make up for those provided for by fresh, enzyme-rich foods.

Natural

The principle of natural is a little trickier and the topic of some debate, at least among the FDA and food manufacturers who have to adhere to agreed upon usage of the word natural when it comes to labeling. Getting into that topic could become quite lengthy. So to make it easy for our purposes here, we will define natural foods as those that Mother Nature has provided us (as opposed to a manufacturer), are not refined or processed or minimally so, and do not contain any artificial or chemical additives, such as colorings, preservatives, flavor enhancers, etc.

Once again with each of the preceding definitions, it becomes clear that there are degrees to which a food may be considered natural. For example, a store bought can of tomato sauce that does not contain any preservatives or chemical additives would be more natural than another brand that does contain preservatives and additives. While a fresh batch of tomatoes from the garden or produce section cooked down to tomato sauce would be more natural and fresher than either of the canned products.

Two other important considerations on the topic of natural have to do with how we eat our food. First, many people who advocate an all raw or a predominately raw foods diet believe that cooking food is not natural. On the other hand, fire is a natural element as well and has been used to cook foods since humans resided in caves. As a result, I tend to agree with the more moderate position of including a combination of both raw and cooked foods in the diet. Most Americans could, however, benefit from eating more raw foods. The problem is, because most have been raised on overly processed, refined and primarily cooked foods and little to no raw foods, their weakened systems are often not accustomed to digesting and eliminating raw foods. This is evidenced by the abdominal discomfort, gas, bloating and disturbed bowel function that those who fit this profile sometimes experience upon introducing raw foods into their diet. If this is the case for you, starting with steamed vegetables and gradually integrating more raw foods into the diet over time is the wisest thing to do.

After your purification program... are you to eat or not to eat, meat?

Probably the most hotly contested debate regarding the human diet is that of the meat-eaters versus the vegetarians. In one corner are those who believe that eating meat is as natural as humans being a member of the animal kingdom. In the other corner are those who believe that eating meat is an aberration, that humans were never meant to be carnivores and doing so goes against our natural biological make-up.

As with any issue that seems to be extremely polarized, myself, along with many others, tend to believe that the truth lies somewhere in the middle. If we look to the wisdom of the ages for guidance and imagine how early humans lived off the land before the domestication of animals, it is very probable that there would be times when animal protein was scarce and people would not eat it for days at a time. On the other hand, there would most certainly be times when schools of fresh tasty fish swam in the nearby stream and edible animals, large and small, roamed the prairie and populated the forests. It is very unlikely, that a hungry human would pass by this abundant source of food. In fact, his or her very survival probably depended on it. Based on this observation, common sense tells me that it is natural and healthy for humans to eat animal protein on some days and to abstain from eating it on others, thereby simulating the natural order.

This conclusive observation has clearly not resulted from the latest high-tech clinical or anthropological study. However, given that studies exist producing evidence supporting both a vegetarian diet and a non-vegetarian diet; in my opinion, a common sense, valid observation is; that it's natural to do both. Whether you agree with this or not is your choice. Recommendations put forth in this book allow for both a vegetarian and a non-vegetarian diet.

Furthermore, I believe that it is wise for people who have been observing one extreme or the other for a long period of time with regard to the eating or not eating of animal protein, to adopt the opposite extreme for a period of time

in order to restore balance to an ailing system. In other words, a vegetarian who has not been eating any animal protein for a lengthy period of time and is feeling very depleted and out of balance (especially those who have very weakened immune systems and are hypoglycemic) may benefit greatly from consuming a bit of animal protein until their system is stronger. Likewise, a voracious carnivore that has been eating animal protein without reprieve for a number of years would benefit greatly by abstaining from animal protein for a period of time.

The most important thing is that you discover what is right for your body at this time in your life and be honest with yourself about whether or not something is working for you. Letting go of a long held belief or position that is not working for you may be the best thing you could ever do for yourself.

How do you know whether or not it's working for you? An objective assessment of your energy level and how you look and feel is the best place to start. Also, take into consideration that Americans in general eat way too much animal protein. Most Americans are eating animal protein 2-3 times a day, which is usually excessive. Cutting animal protein consumption down to 3-5 times a week (including dairy products) is a much healthier range for both humans and their environment.

Little to no processed foods.

Whole, fresh, natural foods are completely intact and contain all of their original enzymes, life-force energy and nutrients; thus, supporting, strengthening and nourishing the body. Processed foods have lost many and sometimes all of these vital elements. Consequently, not only do they not provide complete nourishment; they rob the body of nutrients through the effort of processing them. As discussed, this renders them anti-nutrients, which deplete and degenerate the body. Don't be misled by processed foods with labels touting that they have been "enriched" or "fortified." The synthetic chemicals added to masquerade as vitamins and minerals are anything but natural and do nothing for the devitalized food products to which they are added, as they are still devoid of most enzymes and fiber. In addition, most big brand processed foods on the market today contain toxic chemical additives that further contribute to numerous symptoms and diseases in the body as we have also discussed.

Processed foods, like stimulants (which are often one in the same) also alter the body's natural instincts, causing unnatural cravings. This is especially important for those who struggle with their weight and fall prey to emotional eating. Often what is referred to as emotional eating is not that at all, but rather an addiction, if you will, to a processed or extreme food that has gotten a strangle hold on your whole body-mind chemistry. Such addictions also greatly influence your moods and emotions, which can lead to real emotional eating. It's a vicious cycle. There's nothing like a stimulant food or toxic neurotransmitter, such as MSG or artificial sweeteners (aspartame in particular) to upset your emotional balance and cause mental fogginess and confusion (to name just a few of the side effects). Understanding this can prove to be invaluable in making changes in this area. As with stimulants, when you wean yourself off these substances, you will restore your energy, gain mental clarity, lose excess weight and relieve or eliminate symptoms.

There is a vast difference between foods that have been processed with chemical additives and those that have not. Naturally processed foods can be a great transition or occasional item, but they are still processed foods and wisely kept to a minimum as well. If it comes in a box or a wrapper, it's not whole, fresh or natural, even if you bought it at the health food store. It may be more whole, fresher and more natural than other choices; but, it is still not your best choice. For most people, cutting processed foods out completely would be a major feat in our fast-paced world. Instead, focus on cutting out the chemical-laden pseudo foods, and then gradually reduce the percentage of time you eat natural brand processed foods and all the while, increase the percentage of whole, fresh, natural foods in your diet. This is a sure recipe for better health. And contrary to popular belief, eating an abundance of whole, fresh, natural foods has gotten even easier these days. Bagged carrots and salad greens, rice cookers, vacuum sealers, food processors and other kitchen gadgets can all help cut down on time spent in the kitchen. Enjoy the process... your health is worth it!