



Understanding Food: **Why they say what they say**

By
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Understanding Food

Americans have been told for decades that gaining weight is a simple equation: calories in minus calories out equals weight gained. Time has proven this theory wrong over and over again, yet still we think that if we can only starve ourselves that much more, we can get thin and healthy. It's time to learn otherwise.

This report is excerpted from a larger book entitled "How to Eat Food", available [on my website](#). "How to Eat Food" details the solution to the bedeviling situation described below.

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My Story

Late summer, 2006: my wife and I are in Sequim, Washington, visiting her mother. It was a toasty afternoon, and my mother-in-law mentions that there's a concert going down at the local Coneheads drive-thru. We decide to walk over and hook ourselves up with some music and ice cream. One block later, my wife's hand shoots out and grabs the fence of the house we're walking in front of. She clutches her chest and starts to gasp. It wasn't a heart attack, but it was a palpitation accompanied by severe asthma.

At the time, my wife dealt with asthma on a regular basis, as well as sleeping problems, asthma, anxiety, infertility, severe PMS, hypertension, mood swings, and heart issues. She also weighed more than she will allow me to tell you in this book. She had always been able to deal with her health problems with a resigned smile until that day. Not being able to walk a block with her mom and her husband had her in tears on the sidewalk, suffering a nervous breakdown.

Fast-forward eighteen months, to February 2008. My wife has been pregnant since Thanksgiving, and has lost 60 pounds since the sidewalk incident. We're in our auto-repair shop in downtown Olympia, waiting for our brakes to get done. As we wait, my wife realizes that we have a letter to deliver and a paycheck to cash at the bank. She grins bravely at me and asks me if I would walk with her.

The post office is a half-mile away up a steep hill, and the bank is another quarter-mile past that. We take it slowly, making our one-and-a-half mile round trip in about an hour, and at the end, she's beat and has strained a ligament in her hip...but she made it. She no longer suffers from asthma, having thrown away her inhaler six months earlier. She sleeps like a baby almost every night, and hasn't had a heart palpitation in over a year. Her blood pressure has dropped to normal levels despite the stress of pregnancy.

So what changed?

Our diet. That's it. The day my wife collapsed on the sidewalk, her mother started the process of becoming certified nutritionist, and used my wife as her Patient #1. Everything mom learned, she applied to my wife's well-being, and with some difficulty, my wife has managed to overcome so many health issues that our physician literally doesn't believe her medical record.

Here we are, now mid-summer 2008. My wife is due in four weeks, and she has continued to lose weight during her pregnancy – another 10 pounds on top of everything she already lost. She hasn't suffered from the heartburn, swollen feet, mood swings, or other pregnancy-related issues that everyone warned us about (except the constant bathroom trips). She eats three full meals most days, snacks between them, and has consistently given the baby whatever it asked for in terms of food. Our new diet leaves us content – never hungry, never overstuffed – and healthier than we had ever imagined being.

How We Got Here

So what is wrong with the American diet that a change of eating habits solved so many problems that my wife suffered? Let me give you a little history.

Part 1: Ancel Keys

While it's impossible to point to a single event that is responsible for the American obesity, diabetes, cancer, infertility, and ADHD epidemic, one clear factor is the work of a scientist named Ancel Keys. During World War II, Keys performed starvation experiments on conscientious objectors. He had noticed that heart disease was skyrocketing among well-fed American businessmen, but was dropping significantly in the areas of Europe that had been food deprived by the war. He created the currently-accepted notion that cholesterol was responsible for heart disease, and performed studies to prove it.

The backbone of Keys' hypothesis was a study in which Keys studied heart disease and cholesterol levels versus saturated fat consumption in six countries, and found a direct correlation between the two: the more saturated fat people ate, the more cholesterol and heart disease appeared in those countries.

Keys used that study, along with several others created by his students and associates that seemed to support it, to go on a crusade in the 1950s against the then-traditional high fat diet (bacon, eggs, and sausage for breakfast, fatty steak and potatoes with greasy gravy for dinner). Keys fought long and loudly, and eventually got the attention of the government.

Unfortunately, Keys' research wasn't on the up-and-up. His vaunted six-country study actually had almost two dozen countries' worth of data behind it – he just picked out the six that “proved” his hypothesis and left out the remainder entirely. The other countries had data that utterly defied Keys' hypothesis – some had massive cholesterol levels with no heart disease and little saturated fat consumption, others had lots of heart disease with almost no cholesterol or saturated fat, etc. Other scientists even pointed this out at the time the study was being touted as a revolutionary glimpse into the heart health of the civilized world.

Part 2: The American Heart Association

The flawed science behind Keys' and his associates' proclamation of the so-called evils of dietary fat didn't stop the World Health Organization from listening to and hosting Keys in several Committees on various heart-related issues. After several years of hearing Keys and compatriots talk to and for the WHO, our own government started to listen. According to Gary Taubes, author of Good

Calories, Bad Calories, in 1957 the American Heart Association claimed Keys' hypothesis was "based on evidence that does not stand under critical examination".

Then, a few years later, Keys himself became part of the AHA, and he asked one of his students (who had also joined the AHA) to revise their published opinion of his work. The new report argued that "the best scientific evidence of the time" strongly suggested that Americans would reduce their risk of heart disease by reducing the fat in their diets and replacing saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats. Keys also argued that the studies that could conclusively verify his hypothesis would take too long to finish. People who were in danger could be saved, Keys said, if the government took immediate action to change the American diet. The studies that would prove him right could be done later. Thus, he convinced the government to act on his theory *based on the fact that it wasn't yet verified*.

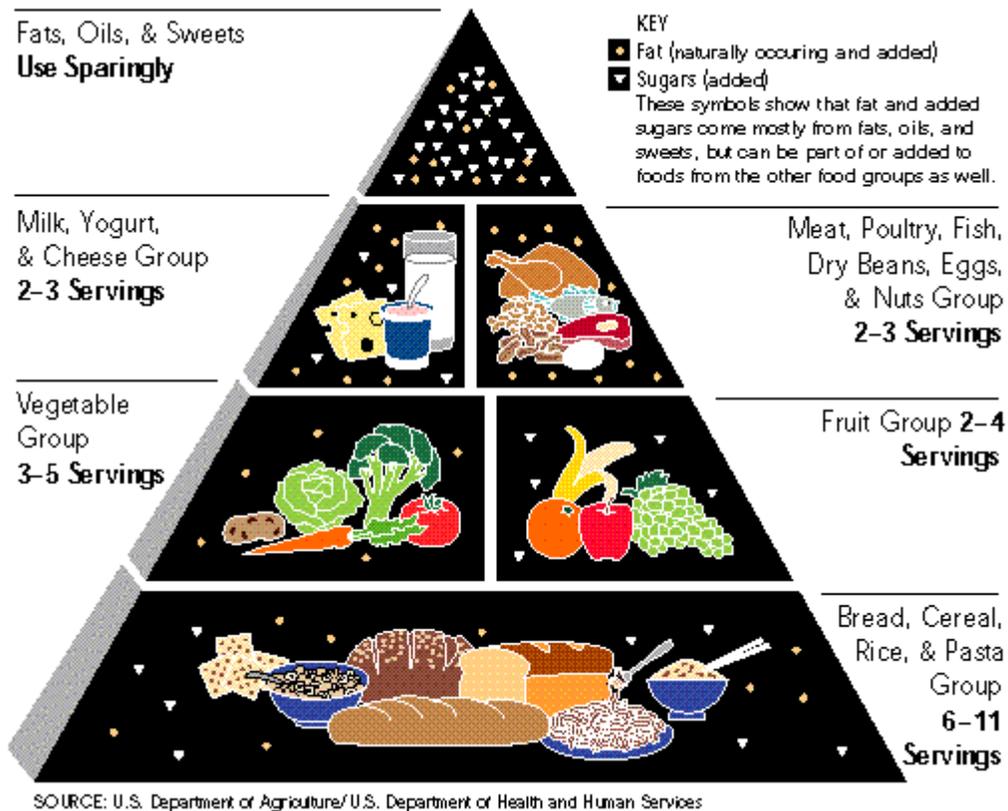
Shortly thereafter, Keys leveraged himself onto the cover of Time Magazine as the face of dietary knowledge in the U.S.A. His low-fat theory became so widespread that to the American public it looked like it was verified fact – almost no one was offering any alternative theories (and those that did were censored by the 'mainstream' scientists). At issue was the question of whether the correlation noted in Keys' studies was enough to assume causation – that is, just because cholesterol appeared in the same people that got heart disease, can we actually claim that one causes the other?

This issue – the question of whether correlation can equal causation – has completely undermined the effectiveness of medicine in general. We take thousands of different prescription drugs today that don't address the causes of our diseases at all. They merely deal with conditions that have been correlated with those diseases. If someone told you that the trees bowing made the wind blow just because the two always happened at the same time, you would scoff. Nonetheless, that is exactly the logic that Keys and his allies used to convince our nation that cholesterol caused heart disease, and their success at that venture has brought about a new dawn of symptom-treating "medicine" that addresses "problems" that are not actually causing any disease whatsoever.

Part 3: The Four Food Groups

The "four food groups" have been around since the 1920s. Originally, it was five – meat/milk, fruits/veggies, fats, sugars, and grains. Then, in 1943, wartime food shortages caused the USDA to further divide the groups into seven by splitting up milk/meat and fruit/veggies into four separate groups. This proved too complex for the American public, and after food stores recovered, the categories were reshuffled into the Four Food Groups that most of us grew up with – meat, veggies, dairy, and grains.

Thirty years later, with chronic diseases like stroke and heart disease on the rise, the USDA needed to address the roles of unhealthy foods. So, during the late 1970s, the USDA added a fifth category to the Basic Four: “sugars and fats” (which also included alcoholic beverages), for people to consume in moderation. A caveat was added to the meats section to remind Americans that fatty meats like high-quality steak counted as fats, not meats – which was reinterpreted to only include lean meats like chicken and lean beef.



“A Pattern for Daily Food Choices,” the USDA’s food guide, has been published annually since the 1980s. Beginning in 1988, the creation of a graphic to represent the food groups started. The Food Guide Pyramid was finally released in 1992. The USDA was concerned that the pyramid was not enough to ensure good nutrition on its own, so today, on every prepackaged food in the grocery store, there is a nutrition label – the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act put this into effect in 1994. Theoretically, Americans could now easily follow the Food Guide Pyramid using the information available on every food they purchased. Keys pushed to have fats nudged toward the top of the pyramid and grains, the long-vaunted ‘staff of life’ by his estimation, on the bottom.

U.S. History of Nutrition Guidance								
1916 5 Groups	Milk & Meat	Vegetables (abbreviated <i>Veg</i>) & Fruits			Cereals	Fats & Fat Foods	Sugars & Sugary Foods	
	↓		↓		↓	↓	↓	
1933 12 Groups	Milk Lean Meat, Poultry, & Fish Eggs Dry Beans, Peas, & Nuts	Tomatoes & Citrus Fruits Leafy Green & Yellow Veg Other Veg & Fruits Potatoes & Sweet Potatoes			Flours & Cereals	Butter Other Fats	Sugars	
	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	
1942 “Basic Seven”	Milk & Milk Products	Meat, Poultry, Fish, Eggs, Dried Peas & Beans	Oranges, Tomatoes, & Grapefruits	Green & Yellow Veg	Potatoes & Other Veg & Fruits	Bread, Flour, & Cereals	Butter & Fortified Margarine	↓
	↓	↓	↓		↓		↓	
1956 “Basic Four”	Milk & Milk Products	Meat, Poultry, Fish, Eggs, Dried Beans, & Nuts	Fruits & Vegetables		Grains		↓	
	↓	↓	↓		↓		↓	
1992 “Food Guide Pyramid”	Milk, Yogurt, & Cheese	Meat, Poultry, Fish, Eggs, Dried Beans, & Nuts	Fruits & Vegetables		Grains		Fats & Sweets	

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine produced this chart following food through the series of re-categorizations. This chart shows how, in the late 50s, the “fats” part of the food groups entirely disappeared, only to reappear in the much smaller (and obviously unhealthy) “sweets and fats” section 20 years later.

Of course, Americans remain confused about healthy eating. A 1996 telephone survey done by the USDA found that over 40 percent of people agreed with the statement “There are so many recommendations about healthy ways to eat, it’s hard to know what to believe.” Because of the emergence of so many diets and programs, it is challenging for Americans to know just what to believe. It seems as if the information we hear is changing every day. In fact, the Food Pyramid changed again in the early 2000’s, as the USDA finally admitted that there is no single diet that is right for every American, and introduced the website www.MyPyramid.gov.

Part 4: Modern Dietary Debate

Today, you can go online and find someone who is willing to lay down his life on the fact that a particular diet works – whether it’s South Beach, All-Chicken, or the ever-popular Yogi Masters’ Air Diet, there is someone out there willing to do whatever it takes to get you to change the way you eat. The problem is that no one has actually compiled a layman’s breakdown of the science behind the transformation of your food into energy, body parts, and waste.

["How to Eat Food"](#) is going to do exactly that for you. I’ve been blessed with the opportunity to watch what happens when the correct diet, as given by a certified nutritionist, is followed by someone who used to suffer from so many maladies that medicine had just about given up on her. I wrote ["How to Eat Food"](#) in order to share my experience and understanding with you.

Epilogue: What's Next?

For my wife and I, a baby is next. My wife's weight and stress problems were such that we were convinced she wouldn't ever get pregnant, but with the knowledge we have now, it happened in just 4 months after she stopped birth control!

We hope to bring up the baby to not fear the obesity epidemic – we've eaten right the entire time our baby has been in the womb, so it's gotten everything it needs for a healthy brain, body, and future (check out The Prenatal Prescription by Peter Nathanielsz and The Crazy Makers by Carol N. Simontacchi, two excellent books on nutrition for babies *in utero*, if you're pregnant or planning a baby). For us, it's all about spreading the word about what we've learned about our bodies, our diets, and our lifestyles.

I encourage you to [join us](#). Getting over the worst of our eating habits is really hard – sugar is on par with cocaine, I've heard my mother-in-law say – but it is the best way to make sure that you live a long, healthy life without fear of the diseases that plague our society.

I guarantee you that it's worth it.

Appendix 1: Sources and other Books to Read

All of these books are excellent resources for anyone who wants to live a long, healthy life free of doctors and hospitals. I encourage everyone to read every single one of them. Twice.

- Good Calories, Bad Calories by Gary Taubes
- The Crazy Makers by Carol Simontacchi
- Nourishing Traditions by Sally Fallon
- Sugar Blues by William Dufty
- Know your Fats by Mary Enig
- The Prenatal Prescription by Peter Nathanielsz
- Adrenal Fatigue by James Wilson