

THE WHOLE TRUTH

A LOOK AT WHOLE FOODS

FITNESS FLYER



By Owen Rothstein

You've heard about them, we're sure that you've eaten them and you've probably even shopped in the market (no relation – sorta), but what the heck are whole foods anyway? Whole foods are foods that are unprocessed or minimally processed. They come more from nature than they do a manufacturing facility, and are free of chemicals, additives, and preservatives. Whole foods include plant-based foods like fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds, fungi, legumes, and animal-based foods like poultry, meat, fish, and eggs. The bottom line is that if you can find it in nature and don't do much to it before you eat it, you're eating whole foods. Seems pretty simple, right?

The reason that whole foods are a buzzworthy, trending topic these days is that there has been a pendulous swing away from the eating habits that people from my generation had become accustomed to. I'm 46 (at time of publication) and I grew up on heavily sugared cereal breakfasts, Chef Boyardee lunches and Swanson Hungry Man dinners. Somewhere in the array of neon colored loops, canned pasta and frozen Salisbury steak, we gained convenience, but lost nutrition. Honestly, with the exception of my grandmother's cooking, everything that I ate until I moved out at 17 was processed, packaged and mostly pathetic. We were the generation of margarine, not butter. We were the first generation of the microwave. Those cans of barely-green, French Cut green beans and syrupy fruit cocktails still haunt my nightmares.

Looking back, and because of the industry in which I work, I can see a lot of the factors that contributed to the over-processing of most of the food in my young life. One factor was the greater presence of women in the workplace. Both of my parents worked, so fast, easy, processed meals were, well...fast and easy. It was also a time when big agribusiness started gobbling up small farms, mechanizing processes and getting more and more packaged foods distributed nationwide. Superhighways and proliferation of air travel meant that we had foods available to us year-round instead of just seasonally. Basically, we were modernizing, but that didn't mean it was for the better.

I'm sure that there were always places and people around the country that resisted the packaged foods, but I didn't really become aware of that resistance until the mid-1990s. I remember seeing a second "health food" store open in downtown Philadelphia and thinking that our city likely wouldn't support a second store. A few years later, we had a Whole Foods Market and a Fresh Fields (another brand owned by Whole Foods) within 20 blocks of one another and that pendulum had begun to swing.

Right around that time, the organic food movement was growing too. Now, to be clear, whole foods and organic foods are not necessarily the same thing. Whole foods can be organic and organic foods can be whole foods, but neither assures the other. Organic regulations cover how the foods are grown and processed, but they can be processed. Some of the benefits that are derived from whole foods can also be derived from organic foods, but that is another article.

A few of the main reasons that whole foods and organic foods were gaining traction was that people started to learn and understand that all of this food processing was often leading to loss of vitamins, minerals and fiber, typically found in the food in its natural state. In addition to these things being removed, tons of stuff was being added to foods during the processing. Additives such as artificial colors and flavors, preservatives, and stabilizers pile in with added sugars and salt to keep foods longer and make them more palatable. The combination of all of this, in the foods that we consume every day, can't help but have a negative effect on health.

Throughout my lifetime, despite the increases in medical technology, we have seen the national obesity rate triple, according to the CDC. There have been notable rises in levels of hypertension (high blood pressure), Type-2 (insulin resistant) diabetes, asthma and IBS. Some of these and other diseases have been directly linked to additive ingredients or levels. If nothing else, processed foods usually have higher calorie counts than the whole-food versions. That alone should be a warning sign.

The fact is that the human body functions better when fed a steady diet of foods as they appear in nature. The less processing your food receives, the more nutrients your body does...almost every time. Try changing your eating habits and see if you start to feel the difference. What happens when you start to cook from scratch? How does it taste? How do you feel? Put your self through a 30 day challenge. Try eating only whole foods for a month and see if you can see positive changes in your body. A woman named Megan Kimble tried it for a year and you might be surprised at what she found. She wrote a book about it called "Unprocessed – My City-Dwelling Year of Reclaiming Real Food." Her advice for anyone afraid of giving a whole foods diet a try was "You'll have to spend more time prepping in the beginning, but once you start to find the habits and the things that work for you, it'll start becoming part of a routine and not so time consuming at all." So it may take more time, but aren't you worth it?

PROJECT: PFC

MISSION STATEMENT

The caring partner displaying this information is a proud member of Project: PFC. Our mission is to provide the simplest, most delicious foods to everybody everywhere. We select natural, whole and minimally-processed foods, drinks and supplements free from all artificial junk, yet rich with nature's goodness. Using current research and educational materials, we're making the world of nutrition "Simple Again".
Eat Well. Live Well (and Long).

Owen Rothstein
Foodie & Nutrition Enthusiast