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# 8 Things My Family Learned When We Gave Up Processed Food For 100 Days



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Then, after reading Michael Pollan's book, *In Defense of Food*, I had the wakeup call of my life when I realized many of the foods we were eating were actually highly processed.

So during the summer of 2010, my family (including my two young daughters) decided to take a "100 Days of Real Food" pledge where we didn't eat a single bite of highly processed food.

That meant no white flour, no sugar, no factory-farmed meat, and nothing out of package with more than five ingredients!

And now, four years later, while we no longer live by a set of strict rules, this lifestyle has become our new normal and we've never looked back.

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Along the way, I've chronicled what we've learned, as well as recipes and other resources on my blog at [100daysofrealfood.com](http://100daysofrealfood.com). Here are eight things we discovered on our path to a healthier life:

## **1. It's easier than it looks.**

Switching to a real food lifestyle may seem intimidating and even downright overwhelming at first, especially for the busiest of families, but I promise it is totally possible.

Just as with any big change, it takes some getting used to — and before long, avoiding processed food will become your "new normal." Simply getting started is key!

## **2. We're much healthier.**

Since we kicked processed food, I have more energy and my husband and I even lost a few pounds. Our youngest daughter, who has mild asthma, experienced a dramatic improvement in her episodes of wheezing and her constipation struggles practically disappeared overnight.

## **3. Always read the ingredient label.**

Reading the ingredient list (as opposed to the nutrition label) is the only way to truly know what's in your food and how highly processed it is.

If it's not something you'd cook with at home, then I'd think again. As a general rule, if we're buying a packaged food, we want it to have five or less whole ingredients.

## **4. Don't let cost keep you away.**

With a little creativity, a real food lifestyle can be done without breaking the bank.

Be sure to create and stick to a meal plan, minimize food waste, maximize cheap foods (like bananas, beans, and pasta) and reduce the consumption of "nice to haves" like flavored beverages and dessert — all these things can help save some money.

## **5. Real food just tastes better.**

People may think we avoid fast food, junk food or other processed stuff because we have to, but honestly that food just doesn't taste good to us anymore! We've basically retrained our taste buds and feel spoiled with fresh, wholesome and homemade meals now. The real thing just tastes so much better.

## **6. It's OK to break the rules (sometimes).**

We followed strict rules for 100 days, but now that our pledge is over, we don't mind indulging in junk food every now and then. But what I prefer is the made-from-scratch sweet treat as opposed to the artificial, factory-made junk food.

## **7. Planning ahead is key.**

If you're caught out of the house starving with nothing to eat, the drive-through might start to look attractive. So it's important to always think through your next meal and have a plan — whether that's a variety of real food snacks in the car or your slow cooker cranking away at home with a yummy dinner.

## **8. Out of sight, out of mind.**

Avoid the temptation to scarf down a bag of deep-fried snacks or a bag of candy by keeping it out of the house. Same with convenience foods — I just don't buy those things anymore. It's hard to eat a bag of mini powdered donuts when they're not there!

The past four years have been quite the journey for our family, but every step has been worth it as we've reaped the benefits of healthier eating and living. After watching my daughter's asthma and constipation disappear, seeing my husband shed extra unwanted pounds, and feeling my energy levels increase, there was just no turning back.

While it might seem overwhelming at first, please remember that any small changes in the right direction are better than none!

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