

timothy  
santo, dc  
chiropractor

# Healthy Notes

38 Oak Street  
Ridgewood, NJ  
201.444.1215

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## Rules Worth Following, for Everyone's Sake

By [JANE E. BRODY](#)

In the more than four decades that I have been reading and writing about the findings of nutritional science, I have come across nothing more intelligent, sensible and simple to follow than the 64 principles outlined in a slender, easy-to-digest new book called "Food Rules: An Eater's Manual," by [Michael Pollan](#).

[Mr. Pollan](#) is not a biochemist or a nutritionist but rather a professor of science journalism at the [University of California, Berkeley](#). You may recognize his name as the author of two highly praised books on food and [nutrition](#), "In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto" and "The Omnivore's Dilemma." (All three books are from Penguin.)

If you don't have the time and inclination to read the first two, you can do yourself and your family no better service than to invest \$11 and one hour to whip through the 139 pages of "Food Rules" and adapt its guidance to your shopping and eating habits.

Chances are you've heard any number of the rules before. I, for one, have been writing and speaking about them for decades. And chances are you've yet to put most of them into practice. But I suspect that this little book, which is based on research but not annotated, can do more than the most authoritative text to get you motivated to make some important, lasting, health-promoting and planet-saving changes in what and how you eat.

### Reasons to Change

Two fundamental facts provide the impetus Americans and other Westerners need to make dietary changes. One, as Mr. Pollan points out, is that populations who rely on the so-called Western diet — lots of processed foods, meat, added fat, sugar and refined grains — "invariably suffer from high rates of the so-called Western diseases: [obesity](#), [Type 2 diabetes](#), cardiovascular disease and [cancer](#)." Indeed, 4 of the top 10 killers of Americans are linked to this diet.

As people in Asian and Mediterranean countries have become more Westernized (affluent, citified and exposed to the [fast](#)

[foods](#) exported from the United States), they have become increasingly prone to the same afflictions.

The second fact is that people who consume traditional diets, free of the ersatz foods that line our supermarket shelves, experience these diseases at much lower rates. And those who, for reasons of ill health or dietary philosophy, have abandoned Western eating habits often experience a rapid and significant improvement in their health indicators.

I will add a third reason: our economy cannot afford to continue to patch up the millions of people who each year develop a diet-related ailment, and our planetary resources simply cannot sustain our eating style and continue to support its ever-growing population.

In his last book, Mr. Pollan summarized his approach in just seven words: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." The new book provides the practical steps, starting with advice to avoid "processed concoctions," no matter what the label may claim ("no [trans fats](#)," "low [cholesterol](#)," "less sugar," "reduced sodium," "high in antioxidants" and so forth).

As Mr. Pollan puts it, "If it came from a plant, eat it; if it was made in a plant, don't."

Do you already avoid products made with high-fructose corn syrup? Good, but keep in mind, sugar is sugar, and if it is being added to a food that is not normally sweetened, avoid it as well. Note, too, that refined flour is hardly different from sugar once it gets into the body.

Also avoid foods advertised on television, imitation foods and food products that make health claims. No natural food is simply a collection of nutrients, and a processed food stripped of its natural goodness to which nutrients are then added is no bargain for your body.

Those who sell the most healthful foods — vegetables, fruits and whole grains — rarely have a budget to support national advertising. If you shop in a supermarket (and Mr. Pollan suggests that wherever possible, you buy fresh food at farmers' markets), shop the periphery of the store and avoid the center aisles laden with processed foods. Note, however, that now even the dairy case has been invaded by products like gunked-up yogurts.

Follow this advice, and you will have to follow another of Mr. Pollan's rules: "Cook."

"Cooking for yourself," he writes, "is the only sure way to take back control of your diet from the food scientists and food processors." Home cooking need not be arduous or very time-

consuming, and you can make up time spent at the stove with time saved not visiting doctors or shopping for new clothes to accommodate an expanding girth.

Although the most wholesome eating pattern consists of three leisurely meals a day, and preferably a light meal at night, if you must have snacks, stick to fresh and dried fruits, vegetables and nuts, which are naturally loaded with healthful nutrients. I keep a dish of raisins and walnuts handy to satisfy the urge to nibble between meals. I also take them along for long car trips. Feel free to use the gas-station restroom, but never "get your fuel from the same place your car does," Mr. Pollan writes.

#### **Treating Treats as Treats**

Perhaps the most important rules to put into effect as soon as possible are those aimed at the ever-expanding American waistline. If you eat less, you can afford to pay more for better foods, like plants grown in organically enriched soil and animals that are range-fed.

He recommends that you do all your eating at a table, not at a desk, while working, watching television or driving. If you're not paying attention to what you're eating, you're likely to eat more than you realize.

But my favorite tip, one that helped me keep my weight down for decades, is a mealtime adage, "Stop eating before you're full" — advice that has long been practiced by societies as diverse as Japan and France. ([There is no French paradox](#), by the way: the French who stay slim eat smaller portions, leisurely meals and no snacks.)

Practice portion control and eat slowly to the point of satiation, not fullness. The food scientists Barbara J. Rolls of [Penn State](#) and Brian Wansink of Cornell, among others, have demonstrated that people eat less when served smaller portions on smaller plates. "There is nothing wrong with special occasion foods, as long as every day is not a special occasion," Mr. Pollan writes. "Special occasion foods offer some of the great pleasures of life, so we shouldn't deprive ourselves of them, but the sense of occasion needs to be restored."

Here is where I can make an improvement. Ice cream has been a lifelong passion, and even though I stick to a brand lower in fat and [calories](#) than most, and limit my portion to the half-cup serving size described on the container, I indulge in this treat almost nightly. Perhaps I'll try the so-called S policy Mr. Pollan says some people follow: "No snacks, no seconds, no sweets — except on days that begin with the letter S."

**Attention:**

**Office Hours For Wednesday  
February 24<sup>th</sup> will be from 7:30am -  
11am only**

## **In Women, Training for a Sharper Mind**

By RONI CARYN RABIN

Older women who did an hour or two of strength training exercises each week had improved cognitive function a year later, scoring higher on tests of the brain processes responsible for planning and executing tasks, a new study has found.

Researchers in British Columbia randomly assigned 155 women ages 65 to 75 either to strength training with dumbbells and weight machines once or twice a week, or to a comparison group doing balance and toning exercises.

A year later, the women who did strength training had improved their performance on tests of so-called executive function by 10.9 percent to 12.6 percent, while those assigned to balance and toning exercises experienced a slight deterioration — 0.5 percent. The improvements in the strength training group included an enhanced ability to make decisions, resolve conflicts and focus on subjects without being distracted by competing stimuli.

Older women are generally less likely than others to do strength training, even though it can promote bone health and counteract muscle loss, said Teresa Liu-Ambrose, a researcher at the Center for Hip Health and Mobility at Vancouver General Hospital and the lead author of the paper, which appears in the Jan. 25 issue of [Archives of Internal Medicine](#).



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#### **Walk-In Office Hours:**

Mon, Wed, Fri: 7:30am-11am  
3pm-6pm  
Thursday: 7:30am-11am  
Saturday: 9am-1pm

#### **Appointment Hours:**

Mon, Wed, Fri: 11am - 3pm

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