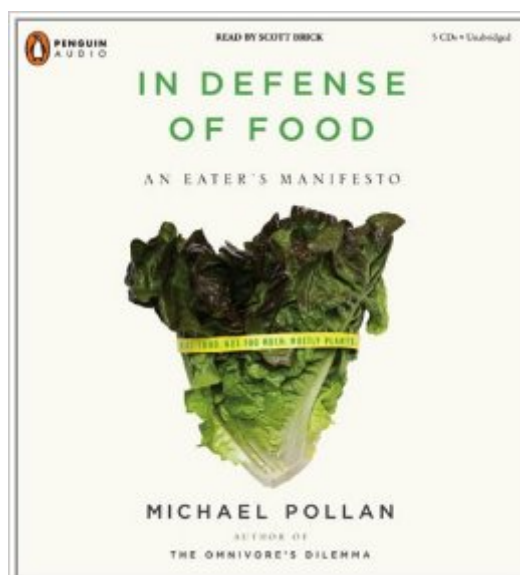


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In Defense Of Food: An Eater's Manifesto



Synopsis

What to eat, what not to eat, and how to think about health: a manifesto for our times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What's better for you --- whole milk, 2% milk or skim? Is a chicken labeled "free range" good enough to reassure you of its purity? How about "grass fed" beef? What form of soy is best for you --- soy milk or tofu? About milk: I'll bet most of you voted for reduced or non-fat. But if you'll turn to page 153 of "In Defense of Food," you'll read that processors don't make low-fat dairy products just by removing the fat. To restore the texture --- to make the drink "milky" --- they must add stuff, usually powdered milk. Did you know powdered milk contains oxidized cholesterol, said to be worse for your arteries than plain old cholesterol? And that removing the fat makes it harder for your body to absorb the fat-soluble vitamins that make milk a valuable food in the first place? About chicken and beef: Readers of Pollan's previous book, "The Omnivore's Dilemma", know that "free range" refers to the chicken's access to grass, not whether it actually ventures out of its coop. And all cattle are "grass fed" until they get to the feedlot. The magic words for delightful beef are "grass finished" or "100% grass fed". And about soy...but I dare to hope I have your attention by now. And that you don't want to be among the two-thirds of Americans who are overweight and the third of our citizens who are likely to develop type 2 diabetes before 2050. And maybe, while I have your eyes, you might be mightily agitated to learn that America spends \$250 billion --- that's a quarter of the costs of the Iraq war --- each year in diet-related health care costs. And that our health care professionals seem far more interested in building an industry to treat diet-related diseases than they do in

preventing them.

Michael Pollan's book has some generally good advice about what to eat, and some fascinating/disturbing info about the American food industry, but I was continually frustrated by the author's weak attention to research. Pollan is not a scientist, and doesn't seem to find it very important to ground his assertions with unimpeachable facts. His advice can sometimes be contradictory ("don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize" but "eat tofu"--If your great-grandmother didn't come from Asia, it's doubtful she would recognize anything made of bean curd) and he tends to cite sources that he likes, rather than sources he's really investigated. For example, Pollan would never list a dairy-industry pamphlet as one of his sources, but he gleefully quotes some rather doubtful statements from an organic-food-industry pamphlet, and apparently didn't bother to ask even one secondary source to verify them. He writes a compelling essay showing that nutrition and dietary habits are incredibly difficult for scientists to study, and implies that any information based on nutritional studies is flawed, yet quotes certain studies as if they are somehow immune to this problem. Pollan maintains that the American government's health-education programs are a major cause of the obesity epidemic, yet the descriptions he gives of these programs don't match my memory of what was actually being taught at the time. And because he gives merely general endnotes, rather than specific footnotes, it's difficult to check where he got his information. I also had a little trouble with Pollan's tone, which is strangely naive, and occasionally condescending.

I thought I'd discovered gold two years ago when I chanced upon Michael Pollan's "The Omnivore's Dilemma" on the new-book shelf at my local library. I'm a health nut, and what Pollan had to say between the covers of that book was exactly what I'd been looking for. The message blew me away. I started telling all my friends, colleagues, and family about how phenomenal and groundbreaking the book was, and encouraging them to read it. I even went so far as to buy five hardbound copies to give out and loan. But in the end I don't believe I really made any serious converts. Plenty of people wanted to listen! Telling my friends and acquaintances about the content of Pollan's book made me a big hit in social situations, but I honestly don't think many people took the time to read the book or, more importantly, to change their eating habits. But Michael Pollan's book did convert me. Over the last two years, I have changed my eating habits--not as much as I hoped I would, but significantly nonetheless. The problem is, as I am sure anyone else knows who has also tried to follow his path: eating healthy in modern, urban America is extremely difficult. "Omnivore's Dilemma"

went on to become a nationwide bestseller. Thanks in part to the stir that book caused, and the many newspaper articles and television programs that followed, there has been a small but noticeable difference in the availability of healthier, more naturally produced vegetables, fruits, meats, and fish in the area where I live.

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