



“Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.”

Michael Pollan, author of [The Omnivore's Dilemma](#), makes an intelligently thoughtful plea for a return to plain old food in "Unhappy Meals," his latest contribution to *The New York Times Magazine*. Here are some highlights:

“Thirty years of nutritional science has made Americans sicker, fatter and less well nourished...

“The sheer novelty and glamour of the Western diet, with its 17,000 new food products introduced every year, and the marketing muscle used to sell these products, has overwhelmed the force of tradition and left us where we now find ourselves: relying on science and journalism and marketing to help us decide questions about what to eat. Nutritionism, which arose to help us better deal the the problems of the Western diet, has largely been co-opted by it, used by the industry to sell more food and to undermine the authority of traditional ways of eating....

“It might be argued that, at this point in history, we should simply accept that fast food is our food culture. Over time, people will get used to eating this way and our health will improve. But for natural selection to help populations adapt to the Western diet, we'd have to be prepared to let those whom it sickens die. That's not what we're doing. Rather, we're turning to the health-care industry to help us 'adapt.' Medicine is learning how to keep alive the people whom the Western diet is making sick. It's gotten good at extending the lives of people with heart disease, and now it's working on obesity and diabetes. Capitalism is itself marvelously adaptive, able to turn the problems it creates into lucrative business opportunities: diet pills, heart-bypass operations, insulin pumps, bariatric surgery. But while fast food may be good business for the health-care industry, surely the cost to society—estimated at more than \$200 billion a year in diet-related health-care costs—is unsustainable....

“Since the widespread adoption of synthetic nitrogen fertilizers in the 1950s, the nutritional quality of produce in America has, according to the USDA figures, declined significantly....

“1. Eat Food...Don't eat anything your great great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food....

“2. Avoid even those food products that come bearing health claims...The American Heart Association charges food makers for their endorsement. Don't take the silence of the yams as a sign that they have nothing valuable to say about health....



“3. Especially avoid food products containing ingredients that are a) unfamiliar, b) unpronounceable, c) more than five in number, or d) that contain high-fructose corn syrup....

“4. Get out of the supermarket whenever possible. You won’t find any high-fructose corn syrup at the farmer’s market; you also won’t find food harvested long ago and far away....

“5. Pay more, eat less....Not everyone can afford to eat well in America, which is shameful, but most of us can: Americans spend, on average, less than 10% of their income on food, down from 24% in 1947, and less than the citizens of any other nation....Paying more for food well grown in good soils will contribute not only to your health (by reducing exposure to pesticides) but also to the health of others who might not themselves be able to afford that sort of food: the people who grow it and the people who live downstream, and downwind, of the farms where it is grown.

“‘Eat less’ is the most unwelcome advice of all, but in fact the scientific case for eating a lot less than we currently do is compelling. ‘Calorie restriction’ has repeatedly been shown to slow aging in animals and many researchers (including Walter Willett, the Harvard epidemiologist) believe it offers the single strongest link between diet and cancer prevention....”

Source: “Unhappy Meals” by Michael Pollan, The New York Times Magazine, Jan. 28, 2007