

In Defense of Food Book Summary, by Michael Pollan

by Allen Cheng

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Video Summaries of In Defense of Food

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiAHzFAd3zo>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBr_i1mH_08

1-Page Summary of In Defense of Food

Overview

We have a lot of choice when it comes to food. Should you choose local, grass-fed beef or save time and money with chicken nuggets? Organic asparagus shipped from Argentina or kale picked from your neighbor's garden? The Omnivore's Dilemma examines the production methods of today's food supply and how they could be improved.

Why would we need help with the food choices we make? We all know what food is.

Do we really need nutritionists to tell us what foods are healthy? In the past 50 years or so, an industry has developed around food and its nutrients. This led to a diet that is mostly processed and stripped of its original nutrients. The result of this diet on our health has been astounding. Therefore, people have created labels for food products in order to distinguish between truly healthy foods and those that claim to be so.

In this article, you'll learn about food recommendations that are based on no more than hypotheses. You'll also discover why we stopped talking about foods and started talking about nutrients. Lastly, you'll find out why your great grandmother's diet is the best one for you to follow today.

Big Idea #1: In the twentieth century, we began to talk about nutrients rather than food.

Think about the last time you wanted to start following a healthier diet. Did you think, "I'll eat more carrots and cucumbers and stop eating beef"? Or did you think, "I need to cut out saturated fats and starchy carbohydrates, and eat lots of vitamins and minerals instead"? If you're like most people, your new diet was expressed in terms of nutrients rather than specific foods.

But when did this happen? Why? During the second half of the twentieth century, food and US government shifted their focus from food to nutrients. Around 1950, a number of scientists believed that fat and cholesterol (i.e., meat and dairy products) was responsible for heart disease. They called it the lipid hypothesis.

In 1968, the US government created a committee to review nutrition and human health. Based on their findings, they produced a report in 1977 called "The Dietary Goals for the United States" that was largely based on the lipid hypothesis.

The committee's goal was to advise people on how to prevent heart problems, but the head of the committee owned cattle ranches. Therefore, he didn't want people to stop eating red meat because that would hurt his interests and those of powerful food lobbyists.

So, the committee's recommendations were changed. Where they previously advised people to "not eat meat and dairy products", they instead advised them to "choose meats, poultry and fish that will reduce saturated fat intake." The new wording was a much smaller threat to the food industry.

As a result of this, the discussion about diets began to change. We started talking about healthy eating in terms of nutrients instead of food.

Big Idea #2: If we're led to believe that nutrients determine a food's healthiness, then we may misinterpret the actual health content of certain foods.

You're in the supermarket and you want to buy pasta. There are two types of pasta: one is "low-carb" and the other is "imitation pasta." Which would you choose? Most people would go with what seems like a healthier option, but both are essentially processed imitations of real food.

But why do we need to rely on professionals to tell us what is good and bad nutrition? We don't really know, because most of the time, they are just translating scientific studies into something that seems more comprehensible. This way of eating is a religion for many people who believe that it's important to maintain health by eating healthy foods like fruits and vegetables. But this also promotes an unhealthy attitude about food in general, where we tend to focus too much on nutrients instead of looking at our overall diet.

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