


# Food Rules

By Michael Pollan


Michael Pollan's *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual* is a collection of principles and guidelines on which consumers can rely to buy healthful food. In his earlier books, *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food*, Pollan describes how the American diet and its industrial structure of producing food is actually making Americans unhealthy. America is home to extremely high levels of obesity, type II diabetes, and heart disease. For readers left wondering what is "safe" to feed their families, Pollan offers this set of *Food Rules*.

In his introduction, Pollan explains how confusing the American supermarket can be. He suggests that food corporations have begun to process foods in ways designed to catch the eyes and dollars of consumers. For example, Pollan points out that there are cereals that claim to help children focus in school. Meanwhile, other cereals have so much food coloring that they change the color of the milk. Unfortunately, Pollan argues, these food innovations have largely distracted people from how to eat healthfully.



Pollan admits that he is not a nutritionist or a scientist, but in his search for answers as a journalist, he has found two agreed-upon facts. First, Americans suffer far higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, and some forms of cancer as a result of their diet. Pollan calls these “Western diseases.” The second fact Pollan discovers is that cultures that rely on traditional diets, ranging from the high-fat diet of the Inuit to the seemingly unhealthy diet of the French, do not suffer from these Western diseases either. (Pollan anticipates that many people will object and argue that people in the West tend to live longer now than ever before, to which Pollan responds that this average has been extended thanks to a lower child-mortality rate.) It may seem rather daunting that the Western diet should be so unhealthy, but Pollan assures his audience that “getting off” the Western diet can lead to very immediate health gains.

From these studies, Pollan draws the conclusion that the American public discussion over health is entirely misguided. Most studies and campaigns seek out a single nutrient that is the magic bullet of a healthy diet rather than focusing on these three nutritional facts. Pollan explains that this is because there is a great deal of money tied up in highly processed foods. There is also a great deal of money to be made in treating the Western diseases. Because nutritional science is relatively new, there is a great deal of uncertainty in its findings. Pollan explains that this uncertainty has become a marketing ploy that allows food corporations to market their food as healthy according to the results of the latest study of a nutritional scientist.



In the midst of all this confusion, Pollan feels that his *Food Rules: An Eater's Guide* provides “hard ground” on which to stand in the midst of the “swamp” of nutritional science. He argues that the key is to “eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.” These words are the primary advice that Pollan offers in *Food Rules* and form the organizational structure of this *Eater's Manual*. However, *Food Rules* will not detail the science behind Pollan's general insights into eating, which Pollan claims is better covered in his book *In Defense of Food*.

Pollan cautions that *Food Rules* is not “antiscience,” and that he has looked for science to support many of his book's claims. However, he has given primacy to the people on whom Americans relied before they started to look to nutritional experts: mothers and grandmothers. For Pollan, these people passed on the accumulated wisdom of tradition and culture. There is a logic behind this faith in tradition and culture, which is that traditional diets have been tested by evolutionary processes rather than scientific ones. Although some of the advice passed down may be old wives' tales, Pollan maintains that there is a great deal of wisdom stored in adages—enough to warrant being preserved and revived.

Pollan cautions his readers against expecting to see a great deal of discussion of nutrition. Although he admits that there are nutrients that people need to eat, he maintains that “foods are more than the sum of their nutrient parts.”

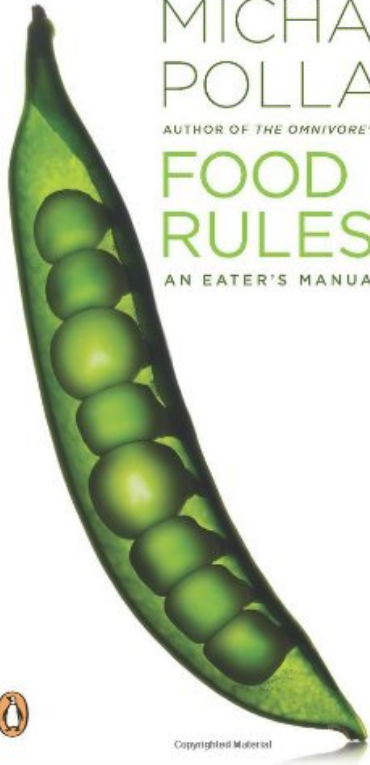
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## PART 1: What should I eat? (Eat Food)

1. Eat food.
2. Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food.
3. Avoid food products that contain high-fructose corn syrup.
4. Avoid food products that have some form of sugar (or sweetener) listed among the top 3 ingredients.

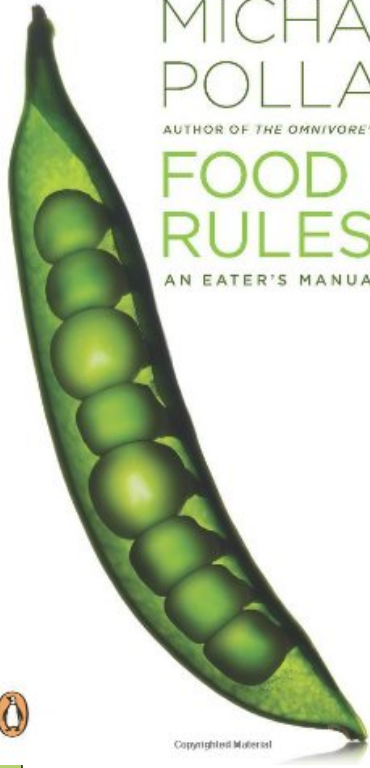
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5. Avoid food products that have more than 5 ingredients.
6. Avoid food products that make health claims.
7. Avoid food products with the words “lite” or the terms “low fat” or “nonfat” in their names.

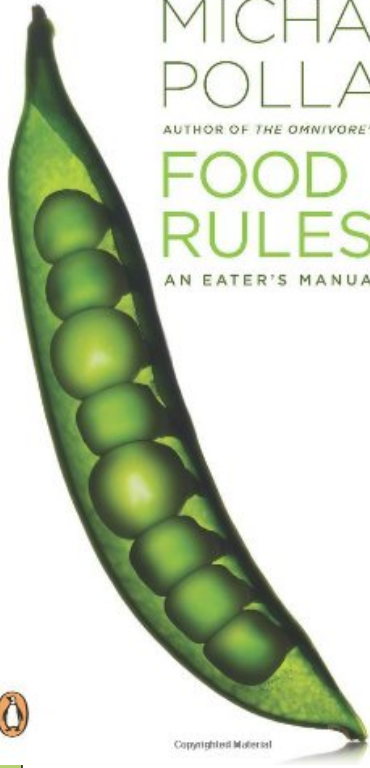
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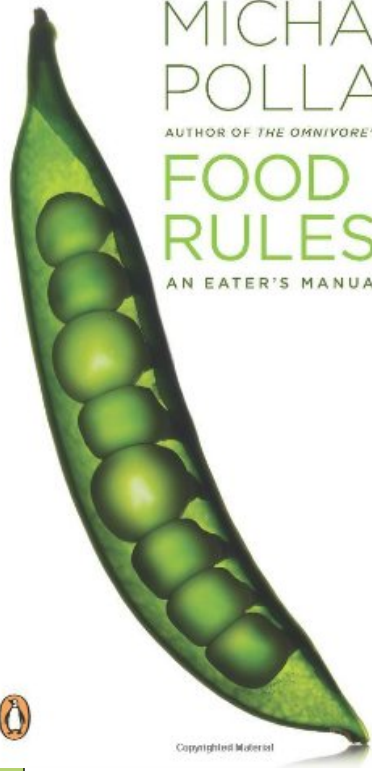
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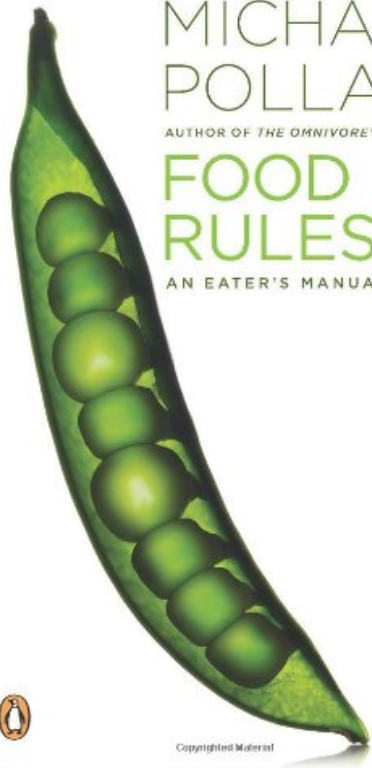
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8. Avoid foods you see advertised on television.
9. Shop the peripheries of the supermarket and stay out of the middle.
10. Eat only foods that will eventually rot.
11. Get out of the supermarket whenever you can.



12. Buy your snacks at the farmer's market.
13. Eat only foods that have been cooked by humans.
14. If it came from a plant, eat it; if it was made in a plant, don't.
15. It's not food if it arrived through the window of your car.
16. It's not food if it's called by the same name in every language (Think Big Mac, Cheetos, or Pringles).





17. Eat mostly plants, especially leaves.
18. Treat meat as a flavoring or special occasion food.
19. Eating what stands on one leg [mushrooms and plant food] is better than eating what stands on two legs [fowl], which is better than eating what stands on four legs [cows, pigs, and other mammals].
20. Eat your colors.

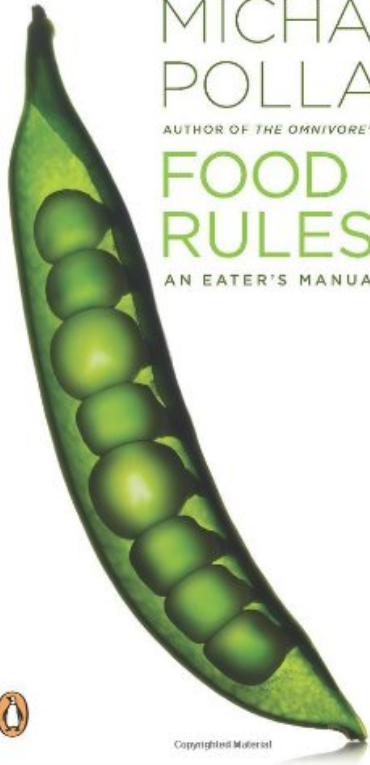
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21. Drink the spinach water.
22. Eat animals that have themselves eaten well.
23. If you have space, buy a freezer.
24. Eat like an omnivore.
25. Eat well-grown food from healthy soil.

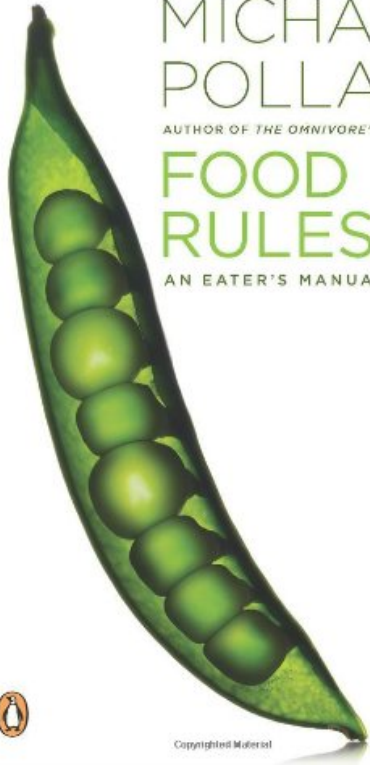
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26. Eat wild foods when you can.
27. Don't overlook the oily little fishes.
28. Eat some foods that have been predigested by bacteria or fungi.
29. Sweeten and salt your food yourself.
30. Eat sweet foods as you find them in nature.

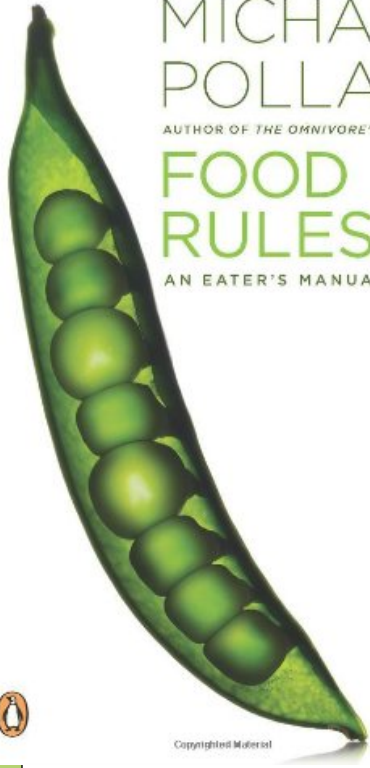
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31. Stop eating before you're full.
32. Eat when you are hungry, not when you are bored.
33. Eat slowly.
34. Serve a proper portion and don't go back for seconds.
35. Breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, dinner like a pauper.

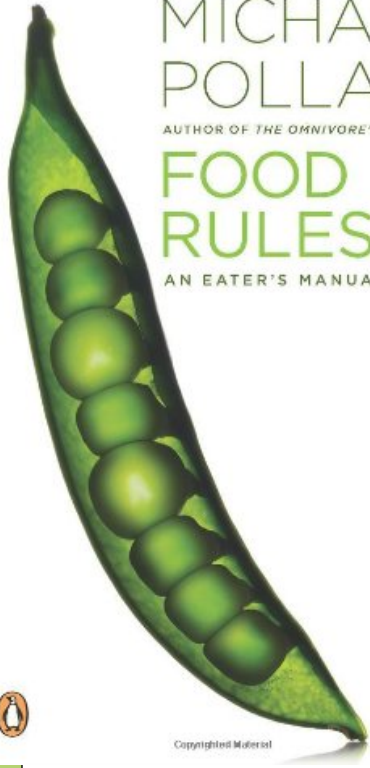
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36. Don't eat breakfast cereals that change the color of the milk.
37. The whiter the bread, the sooner you'll be dead.
38. Favor the kinds of oils and grains that have traditionally been stone-ground.
39. Eat all the junk food you want as long as you cook it yourself.
40. Pay more, eat less.

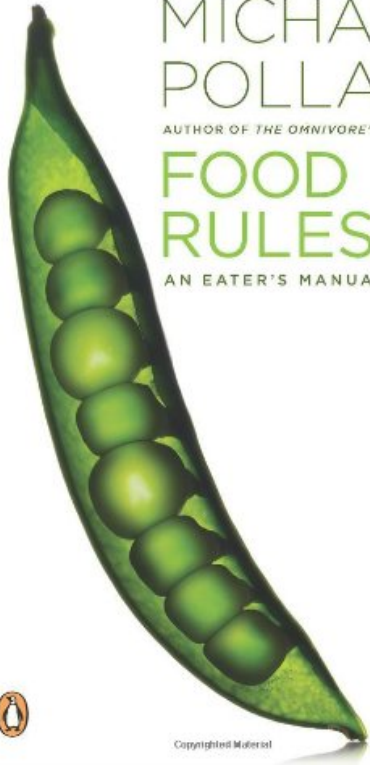
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41. Limit your snacks to unprocessed plant foods.
42. Try not to eat alone.
43. Treat treats as treats.
44. Plant a vegetable garden if you have space, a window box if you don't.
45. Cook.
46. Break the rules once in a while.