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An incendiary work of science journalism debunking the myths that dominate the American diet and showing readers how to stop feeling guilty and start loving their food again—sure to ignite controversy over our obsession with what it means to eat right.

FREE YOURSELF FROM ANXIETY ABOUT WHAT YOU EAT

Gluten. Salt. Sugar. Fat. These are the villains of the American diet—or so a host of doctors and nutritionists would have you believe. But the science is far from settled and we are racing to eliminate wheat and corn syrup from our diets because we've been lied to. The truth is that almost all of us can put the buns back on our burgers and be just fine.

Remember when butter was the enemy? Now it's good for you. You may have lived through times when the Atkins Diet was good, then bad, then good again; you may have wondered why all your friends cut down on salt or went Paleo; and you might even be thinking about cutting out wheat products from your own diet.

For readers suffering from dietary whiplash, *The Gluten Lie* is the answer. Scientists and physicians know shockingly little about proper nutrition that they didn't know a thousand years ago, even though Americans spend billions of dollars and countless hours obsessing over "eating right."

In this groundbreaking work, Alan Levinovitz takes on bestselling physicians and dietitians, exposing the myths behind how we come to believe which foods are good and which are bad—and pointing the way to a truly healthful life, free from anxiety about what we eat.

The Gluten Lie: And Other Myths About What You Eat Details

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Olwen says

The author has a valid point - that extremes in nutrition really aren't helpful, and are often over-hyped. But his argument is presented with such ferocious spite that I expected at any moment to have to wipe some spittle from the page. What could have been an interesting exploration of the ever-ongoing debate was actually an emotive rant. The author's vitriol didn't endear me to his recommendations.

It must be possible to disagree in science without hostility, surely?

Jaclyn says

I picked up this book out of frustration with all the diets out there and lack of solid information about what is truly 'healthy'. So I enjoyed that the author basically says that much of the fads are not based on scientific findings, and points out how other authors cherry-pick the data, use scare tactics, revert to Nature, and claim modernity as the problem. I tend to think of myself as being very scientific-minded, but I gotta say I was really peeved that he apparently regards anything not based on proven science as 'magical thinking'. What about instinct? What about tradition? Why is it 'illogical' to make food choices based on 'the good old days'? Why should we just accept whatever new chemical or treatment of our food (he says nothing about pesticides) as okay until proven otherwise? He also talks about 'the dose is the poison' so just because something is shown to be harmful in high doses, we shouldn't worry about the low doses -- is that in one meal? one day? one year? a lifetime? -- if there isn't a good study, then don't worry about it.

It's interesting that, because the science is lacking to prove something is harmful, it therefore must be okay. I guess I agree, as long as there was an attempt to show it is not harmful by an independent source, but to me that still means - eat a varied diet.

He does conclude that simply preparing your own food and taking the time to actually sit down and eat is likely to make you feel better -- basically, stop stressing out about your food and just enjoy it. Any sickness/issues you had contributed to food before were 'all in your head' -- not real happy about this idea either. Might the symptoms be real, but the cause be unknown (disease, allergies, gut imbalance, etc.)?

While some information was interesting, I found the book annoying because he seems to jump to conclusions just as the people he has a beef with do (I also felt it was almost personal -- does he truly feel these people are evil? have their claims actually harmed people??). But I agree we need to stop reacting to every food/diet claim, especially so passionately as some of us tend to do.

Two stars because the book was interesting, readable, but overall I find his message unclear and confusing - what exactly is his point? And is there any source of reliable information when it comes to diet? Or does he truly believe diet has no role in human health?

Megan says

I wanted to love this book. I wanted to buy a dozen copies and anonymously mail them to all the people who post about juice fasts and "eating clean". I think I'm more disappointed in it because of that than I would be if I didn't want to love it so much. Like when the politician you voted for says something idiotic, and that's worse than when the other guy says something equally idiotic. Because you're on the same side, how can your guy be saying idiotic things?!

Alan Levinovitz is a "scholar of religion", as the Chapter 1 begins. He claims that he's able to write about food science because of the way that fad diets follow standard myth archetypes. If this was a book about the development and progression of food myths over history with a conclusion that summed up in 15-20 pages the current scientific findings on gluten, fat, salt, sugar and carbs (i.e., the first should be avoided if you're among the fraction of the population with legitimately-diagnosed Celiac Disease, and is just another harmless protein composite for everyone else; the other four are a necessary part of a human diet and should be consumed in moderation), that would be an amazingly interesting and helpful book. It would help people identify future food fads by knowing what to look for. But that is not this book.

(A picky note on the cover: the author is listed as Alan Levinovitz, PhD. Yes, it's true, he has a PhD, in religious studies. It's in poor taste to trumpet your own irrelevant qualifications on a book that derides others for doing the same.)

The book's cover promises "The truth about Salt, Sugar, Fat, Carbs...and the latest fad, Gluten". That's where it begins to fail. The gluten chapter does alright; it's a history of Celiac Disease developments and how prior treatments for CD have also been diet crazes. It explains why self-diagnosing CD and self-treating with a GF diet is a bad idea, and it breaks down why going GF is of absolutely no use for the vast majority of the population. Best of all, it begins to get into how to interpret the findings of scientific studies as reported in the media. Solid beginning, if underwhelming. 3/5 stars.

Chapter 3 "Fat Magic" is where it starts to go downhill. Levinovitz had started to talk about critical thinking when it comes to scientific studies, but stops here before he gets too far down that road because he's about to start throwing around studies and numbers that sounds a lot like what the food fad people do and just hope you don't notice. The most bizarre example was citing a study that showed that the world's population of animals has gained weight over the last three decades, which is apparently meant to be interpreted as proof that fat people don't control getting fat. The chapters on Salt and Sugar get even worse. At one point, the author cites a study where children are given higher-than-recommended levels of sugar and compared to children who consume no sugar. The high-sugar children do better on a variety of measures, "proving" that we should all give our children higher-than-recommended amounts of sugar. But wait, where's the comparison to the children who consumed the recommended levels of sugar? Are they better or worse than the no-sugar or the high-sugar kids? Is this a linear progression or a bell curve? It's this kind of very basic logical fallacy that nearly had me throwing the book against the wall. (I didn't. It's a library book and I just couldn't bring myself to do that to my library.)

I was set on 1 star until the annotated "UNpacked Diet". Basically, Levinovitz wrote a fake fad diet plan (using actual fad diet language), and then provides an annotated version that unpacks all of the ways these diet books try to trick us. Skip the first, unannotated version. If you've spent any time in the diet section of your local bookstore, there's nothing new, and if you haven't, you're not going to be helped by reading through it without the notes. This is a fantastic idea that packs more information people can actually use than the rest of the book taken together. The second star is solely because of this section.

Long story short: If you want to learn about food myths, skim this book for the interesting parts. If you're looking for "the truth about [food]", look to reputable sources (NIH, Mayo Clinic, overviews of published findings). If you want to read more about pseudoscience in medicine, read *Do You Believe In Magic* by Paul A. Offit, MD.

Antonia says

Fascinating. Well written. Science-based. Highly entertaining. And a completely different perspective on diet fads and fantasies. Most refreshing. Prescriptions about what to eat and what not to eat have a lot in common with the dictates of religious cults, and the followers are no less fervent. Our beliefs in (or hopes for) diets, like our beliefs in supernatural forces, are largely based in magical thinking. It's so hard not to buy into the myths, in false dichotomies, and the moralistic categorization of some foods as natural and good, while others are unnatural (processed!) and evil. "Once you see enough of the same archetypal myths and the same superstitions," Levinovitz says, "new dietary claims start to look a lot like flood myths."

We really don't know what an ideal diet would be, or for whom. Nutrition research is notoriously hard to do. It's easy to scoff at fad diets, but Levinovitz also makes clear that there's precious little evidence for most of what we think we "know" about healthy eating — or, for that matter, little evidence behind many of the solemn pronouncements of the medical establishment, including some made by the American Heart Association and the CDC. I'm not saying, nor is Levinovitz, that we shouldn't trust healthcare authorities, but we should also cultivate a healthy skepticism and a return to common sense.

Oh, and don't worry. The book is not all about gluten. That's one chapter. Levinovitz recounts the history of fears about MSG, gluten, fat salt, and sugar — the same story told, the same mistakes made, time after time. It can be seen as pretty depressing, but fortunately Levinovitz is humorous and irreverent. Speaking of which, I heartily recommend the audiobook. The reader, Barry Press, is excellent. I think he made it even more entertaining than it already is.

This is one story recounted in the book (though I found it in an article that Levinovitz wrote for Slate.com.). "Once, at a farmers market, I asked a juice vendor whether her product counted as "processed"—a vague, unscientific epithet that gets thrown around in discussions of what we should eat. After a moment of shock, she impressed upon me that processing fruit into juice doesn't result in processed food. Only corporations, she insisted, were capable of making processed food. Not only that, but it wasn't the processing that made something processed, so much as the presence of chemicals and additives.

Did the optional protein powder she offered count as a chemical additive, I pressed? A tan, gaunt customer, eager to purchase her cleansing smoothie, interrupted us. "It's easy," she said, staring at me intensely. "Processed food is evil."

At least she was honest. Processed food is evil. Natural food is good. Evil foods harm you, but they are sinfully delicious, guilty pleasures. Good foods, on the other hand, are real and clean. These are religious mantras, helpfully dividing up foods according to moralistic dichotomies. Of course, natural and processed, like real and clean, are not scientific terms, and neither is good nor evil. Yet it is precisely such categories, largely unquestioned, that determine most people's supposedly scientific decisions about what and how to eat."

Amy says

This was an interesting read about food/diet trends (not just gluten but also fat and sugar) and how to spot them. In the back is an example diet & then the author shows you the "red flags" that should warn us if a fad. There are a lot of food myths out there. This was a voice of reason. Great book!!

Lee says

Sobering comments regarding the food hysteria that is currently prevalent. As many people have said, the final section takes a bit of a slide, it feels like he has bowed to publisher pressure with regards to the writing style, ultimately suffocating the ideas in hyperbole.

Cleokatra says

Good book. It's a little superficial, but it covers a lot of dietary myths and does a good job of explaining why drastic approaches to nutrition are not necessary or useful.

Wendi says

A bit of a disappointment. The book has a great premise: tracking the history of food and diet myths in order to understand why people accept different "fads" as "truths", but the author tells more than he shows. In this way the book felt too preachy and if a reader who agrees with him on most points feels lectured, the book won't have much of an impact on skeptics. Still, the book was a quick read and provided some good examples and good information about the history and controversies surrounding fat, carbs, and gluten.

Atila Iamarino says

Alan Levinovitz é um professor que trabalha com filosofia e religião, o que contribui para um ponto de vista bem diferente sobre dietas. Ele encontra um fio condutor de fundo supersticioso que amarra a maioria das dietas, com elementos como alimentos com propriedades iguais (comer gordura = ficar com gordura), comidas malditas (glúten), o passado no paraíso (paleodieta) e outros, que explica ao longo do livro. Vira um bom debate sobre verdades e exageros do que sabemos (e não sabemos) sobre nutrição humana, com uma ótima perspectiva crítica de alguém que não tem muito a ganhar ou perder defendendo esta ou aquela dieta.

Só uma falha crítica do audiolivro, pelo menos na versão da Audible que escutei: o capítulo final é uma dieta que o autor propõe, a dieta da comida sem embalagem, onde ele usa tudo o que apontou de errado no livro para defender que a causa da obesidade são as embalagens. Na versão impressa ou ebook, há uma segunda variante do capítulo anotada, demonstrando que é falso, onde ele marca tudo de errado com a "dieta" e quais os elementos que usou. Mas o audiolivro não tem essa parte anotada, fica só na proposta, dando a entender

que o autor se contradisse completamente no final e usou o livro todo para vender a sua dieta.

Prima Seadiva says

I had mixed feelings about this book (2.5 stars). I don't usually write such long reviews.

However having been involved with natural foods since the late 60's and working in the retail end for 39 of those years I've seen a lot of change and food trends and the subject is of long interest to me. This book addressed some of them. I worked in 2 local places, one now gone, the other thriving celebrating 37 years this month.

I recall when plain yogurt was considered very exotic. Now in every flavor known to humans it's become a probiotics panacea. Since then there was wheat germ, bee pollen, brewer's yeast, whole wheat, whole grains, oat bran, quinoa, wheat free, soymilk, almond milk, tofu, tempe, high carb, low carb, low fat, no fat, more fat, no white sugar, honey, pomegranate juice, unpasteurized, fermented, organic, non GMO, no rBGH, grass fed, free-range, cage free, vegetarian, fruitarian, macrobiotic, vegan, paleo, gluten free, fasting, cleansing. And that's the short list. I've eaten most of them if for no other reason than if a customer asks me a question. Most are not quite mainstream everywhere, but in larger cities you will find many of these food items in your local supermarket or food coop.

Am I biased? Yes, I personally think that a diet of mostly unprocessed, organic foods is healthier than heavily processed food regardless of what foods you choose to eat. Fewer additives may be better. It can take more time to prepare your own meals but there are ways to plan meals to offset that. Is it more expensive, yes, for some items no, for others. Having cooking skills makes this easier. Where I worked, part of our goal was to help people learn how to do these things. I also believe that people deserve to work in safe conditions and be paid fairly; that plants are not just trademarked product; that animals are not just product and should be raised humanely and respected for their sacrifice. To the best of my ability I abide by these guidelines but am not perfect.

So back to the book. I did like parts of the book that clarified such things as yes, for people who are celiac it is very important that they know about gluten in their food but that doesn't mean it's poison for everyone. No, for many people salt is not lethal. A little sugar won't kill you but seriously should you drink a liter of pop a day? Likewise with the other topics addressed. Is there lots of self-interest and greed built into fads-yes that applies to more than food today. Fanaticism is off putting whether it's food, religion, politics or morality.

I thought the rice diet story was the saddest, more due to the utter hypocrisy involved in the manipulation of women's fears about being fat to control and bilk them while feeding them a crappy diet. It would be another whole article to write about the search for belief and how people are manipulated by it to spend money on hope. The author does touch on this.

What I did not like is the author's tendency to sarcasm and snarkiness about presenting his information. I listened to the audiobook and to me the reader's interpretation seemed to emphasize this. Interestingly it sounded very much like the behavior of people who are being fanatical in the other direction. To me he discounted some useful information in doing this.

I also thought the author was somewhat naïve about the influence of "big food" i.e. corporate food producers and political pressures. Over the last 20 years large food corporations have seen lots of money to be made in organic and "natural" foods. Many independent businesses have been bought up. There has been pushing

back and forth about revising organic certification standards which are quantifiable unlike the term natural. Many millions of dollars have been spent to protect interests and profits. Organic standards have been challenged to weaken them. GMO labeling has been resisted. I recall when ingredient and nutrition labeling was resisted for the very same reasons too hard, too expensive.

Whatever the current fad of dietary cure all is, a lot of businesses do jump on the marketing bandwagon. Consumer health is not always the first priority.

Then in the last chapter, the author went totally fanatical too. It's not that he was incorrect about eating with intention not distraction or avoiding plastics; his information is good. But just as he dinged other extremists about back to nature, the past was better, single item cures, he then went on to say ONLY his advice would solve ALL our problems.

I recall a member of our food coop who lobbied hard for our store to be vegan in every area but... pet food. I asked her why selling non vegan pet food is okay and she replied "well, I have a cat". I said "So, you are saying that though all of us have different contradictions in our choices, your contradiction is the only acceptable one." Yes, she thought we should all abide by her choices as they were the only "right" ones.

We all have contradictions in our lives. You can only be aware of them and choose what is best for you without harming others. For years I had on my office bulletin board a quote from Epictetus;

"Preach not to others what they should eat, but eat as becomes you and be silent." I guess by writing this review I have perhaps ignored my own advice.

And don't forget as Warren Zevon said about life "How much you're supposed to enjoy every sandwich."

A chart of who owns what-organic brands purchased by large mainstream producers

<https://msu.edu/~howardp/organicindus...>

Angelea says

I really loved this book. The author puts forth and validates so much of what I have observed over the years when counselling people regarding the constantly moving targets in nutrition. Levinovitz's perspective is refreshing and brings to the table insights only someone outside the science and practice of nutrition is likely to notice. I highlighted so many passages and found myself gaining my own new insights and saying "Yes!" a lot.

I think there is much to be gained from considering the author's unique perspective and it will be appreciated by anyone with interest in diet and nutrition. This book will be especially eye-opening to anyone who has ever attempted to follow a specific diet or latched on to some kind of health or nutritional ideal - and I include myself in this category of suckers.

I would have given the book 5 stars, except I did observe a couple of minor inconsistencies in the author's logic and one or two passages where he could have elaborated a little more on the history of some nutritional practices and dietary recommendations so I felt the information was a bit incomplete. But it's definitely worth the read!

Caitlin says

As someone who is utterly sick and tired of being told what I'm not meant to eat, or worse, that giving my child fruit is tantamount to giving them chocolate, I was desperate to know I'm not the only person who relies on dieticians, not whatever nutritionist or wanna-be is flogging their new diet, says I should be eating.

The title of this book is quite misleading, so it's important not to get the wrong idea about this book. This is not a book about nutrition or arguing the science of what is and isn't "good" for us in the end – rather this is from a communications writer who is more concerned with the way in which people communicate about diets, especially using semi-religious terminology. As someone fascinated by rhetoric (as in proper Aristotelian rhetoric, not "rhetoric as another word for spin") and a diagnosed coeliac (sick of people telling me "Oh go on, be naughty") I found this was great.

The central idea isn't that we should eat sugar, salt, fats and other "bad" foods with reckless abandon, or that Big Food (Big Salt, Big Fat etc) aren't doing terrible things, but that just as we are sold terrible foods through persuasive messages we need to be wary of being sold terrible diet ideas. Likewise we need to unpack how and why we label some things as "evil" or considering them as so highly addictive that even a very small amount is terrible beyond measure. We need to stop imagining the mystic past as a place of good food where nobody got sick or they lived into their late years on whichever ancient "superfood" is the latest trend, when this wasn't necessarily the case.

I feel that although thorough and in-depth, this was a short book, and a shorter one would have been okay. Much of the bulk of the pages is taken with footnotes at the end, which is great as it demonstrates the book is based on more than conjecture. There is also a long, extended example of how a diet is sold, with the section reprinted with comments of how it has been constructed. I do wonder if it was necessary to effectively have the section printed twice, but I can see why it was important to read the section "as is" before it is pulled apart.

Whether you agree with the points or examples, there is certainly plenty of food for thought – and thought for food.

Richard says

Much diet and health advice is based on the type of faith more often seen in churches and synagogues than in scientific laboratories, so I'm glad that at last we get a health book by a professor of religion! He shows convincingly why today's popular Paleo, anti-gluten, and other restrictive diets are just the latest in a long line of overhyped attempts to explain something that is far too complicated for our human minds to comprehend.

With good overviews of MSG, Sugar, Fat, Salt, and more, he shows the flimsiness of the evidence that has been used to explain why these things are bad. The final two chapters (highlighted in darker pages) should be required reading of anyone trying to decipher a modern health/diet book: one chapter convincingly explains his new theory for the *real* cause of obesity in America, and then in the final chapter he refutes himself line

by line in a devastating takedown showing the all-too-familiar pseudo-scientific language that deceives us.

see a on my blog.

Antonio Pontes says

O livro vai bem até o fim, quando o autor começa a fazer a mesma lavagem cerebral que expõe durante o livro, mas com outro vilão. uma decepção... Sem verdadeiros dados científicos em momento algum

The book is ok until the lasts chapters, when the author starts the sema brain wash he exposes thru out the book, changing the villain. Very disapointing. No science at all.

Karolína says

I really wanted to like this book. Like really REALLY. I think anyone familiar with social media nowadays must be annoyed by some of the self-appointed health gurus, who have a "simple fix" to all your problems. Just follow this diet, ups, its not called diet anymore, its LIFESTYLE now, and all your problems will disappear....no gluten is the latest trend.

And the book starts with the latest gluten craze. It explains a bit the history of celiac disease and how it's non-sense for people who are not celiacs to avoid gluten like a plague. However it goes downhill from there. The next chapters look at sugar, fat and sodium and Levinovitz goes on and on about how there is always conflicting research and how the studies are badly interpreted and how we don't really know what is good for us.

Might as well be, but he doesnt cite 1 study!!! Not a single 1!!! He just casually mentiones that "this one study done in university of blablabla" proved the previous study wrong. Ehm ok...how about you add it to the footnotes, because for all I know, you just pulled it out of your hat:-)

He basically does throughout the book the exact thing that he criticizes - there was a pragraph about how 1 study doesnt really prove anything and there needs to be more extensive research.....and only couple pages later, he goes on about how 1 study disproved the recommended sodium dose as too low.....ehm, im sorry, didn't you just school us about how 1 study doesn't prove anything at all?

Another thing that bugs me is that the author of this book is a religionist. He is a scholar, so I have no doubts he is a smart guy, however nutrition is obviously not his field. That is why I found it ridiculous when he was making fun about the 2 guys, who came up with paleo (I think?) saying that they are not really experts, because they are only cardiologists....ehm...ok....you are a freaking religionist so how does that add up?:D

While I understand he is upset about people not checking facts, blindly following the next "simple fix"and spreading lies or twisting the truth...the idea was passed on poorly and quite hypocritcly.
