

What is a Whole Food?

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To determine whether a food is whole or not one must be awake when making food choices. Before we put a bite in our mouths, before we heat it up, before we even decide to toss it in our grocery cart, there needs to be a moment, a second, when we consider where the food came from. What was its life like before it came to be on this grocery store shelf? Foods that are in boxes can be pretty mysterious. For simple whole foods, foods that don't need a list of ingredients, imagining what their journey was like is easier. I have found that the best way to determine whether a food is whole or not is to ask these questions:

Can I imagine it growing?

It is easy to picture a wheat field or an apple on a tree. Tough to picture a field of marshmallows. I know of no streams where one can scoop up a bucket of diet soda, no trees where one can pick froot loops.

How many ingredients does it have?

A whole food has only one ingredient - itself. No label of ingredients is necessary on simple foods like apples, salmon and wild rice.

What's been done to the food since it was harvested?

The less, the better. Many foods we eat no longer resemble anything found in nature. Stripped, refined, bleached, injected, hydrogenated, chemically treated, irradiated, and gassed; modern foods have literally had the life taken out of them. Read the list of ingredients on the labels; if you can't pronounce it or can't imagine it growing, don't eat it. If it is not something that you could possibly make in your kitchen or grow in a garden, be wary.

Are all of the original edible parts still present?

Juice is only a part of a fruit. Oil is only part of the olive. When you eat a lot of partial foods, your body in its natural wisdom will crave the parts it didn't get.

F r e s h * L o c a l * O r g a n i c

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Fresh

Fresh is best. The chemical composition of food changes radically a few hours after harvest simply because it is cut off from its food and water supply. Fresh food, particularly fresh produce, gives us maximum nutrients and flavor. Frozen food can be good too. Most of the nutrients are retained in foods that are frozen however some of the enzymes, color and flavor will have disappeared. If purchasing frozen fruits and vegetables, the texture will have changed. The foods are much less crisp than fresh foods because the cell structure is damaged by crystallization of water. Canned foods have most of their nutrients present but the flavor, color and texture suffer. One exception is tomatoes, which are picked at maximum ripeness and canned the same day. Often a canned tomato will be superior in flavor than a fresh tomato purchased in February that was flown thousands of miles.

Local

Did you know that 86% of our fruits, nuts and vegetables are grown on farms surrounding America's cities? Most farmers who sell their food locally don't artificially treat crops to withstand shipping and extend their shelf life. Have a conversation with some of the non-organic vendors at

your local farmer's market and you may find out that some local farmers do not use synthetic fertilizers or pesticides, but lack the size or profits to go through the rigorous process to attain organic status. Many farmers will sell their eggs, beef and pork directly to the consumer. The same is true for milk and milk products from healthy cows and goats. Check out www.eatwild.com and click on your state. Consider subscribing to a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) where a box of fresh, locally grown produce is delivered or picked up every week. The site www.localharvest.org has listings.

Organic

Your organic purchase says that you support the growers and manufacturers who are producing food without the use of the synthetic fertilizers, insecticides, fungicides, herbicides or pesticides that pollute your body and your world. Buying organic produce, especially locally grown produce, also helps keep you in tune with the seasons. Many believe that organic produce tastes better and contains more nutrients.

Make a special effort to use organic products when preparing food for pregnant or nursing moms, infants, and children. Toxins found in the mother's food can cross the placenta to the growing fetus or wind up in breast milk. What may be tolerated by a mature adult may prove harsh to the immature system of fetus or infant. Regulatory practices used to control pesticides in foods are based on studies of pesticide exposure to the general population, without regard to the special needs of infants. Some of the most pesticide-saturated foods are ones that we routinely give children to snack on, including strawberries, peanut butter, apples, peanuts, raisins, and potato chips. To find out which foods contain the most pesticides, visit the Environmental Working Group web site.

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