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Chapter 1

Eating Clean for a Healthier Body, Mind, and Soul

Eating clean has been getting a lot of press lately — in books, websites, seminars, and various other media outlets. But what exactly is eating clean? Is it a diet? If so, what kinds of foods can you eat (and not eat) on the plan? And what is “clean” food, anyway?

You may be turning to this book because you’ve tried just about every other diet on the planet and you’re tired of counting calories, carbs, and fat grams. If that’s the case, you’ve come to the right place! One of the best things about the eating clean plan is that after you get the basics down pat, you don’t have to keep track of your fat or protein intake or add up any points. After all, the plan’s main focus is eating whole foods, which are naturally nutrient dense and low in calories.

Like most other diets, the eating clean plan offers several guidelines for following it, but another one of the great things about this plan is that you get to decide how much of your diet will be clean (and how much won’t). You’re in control, so if you decide that 90 percent of your diet is going to be clean, you can still fit some processed foods into your diet. If you decide to start out with a 50-50 mix, half of your

diet will consist of clean foods while the other half includes the foods you already eat and enjoy.

In this chapter, we define clean eating and look at the differences between whole foods and processed foods. We look at some of the dangers of processed and refined foods and list the benefits of eating clean. Finally, we look at food's effect on your body, mind, and soul and explain how following the eating clean lifestyle can improve all three!

What Clean Eating Really Is

Clean eating is the act of basing your diet on whole, unprocessed, preferably organic foods. In other words, when you eat clean, you try to eat as low on the food chain as possible; choose foods that are not processed, but just as they are harvested. By focusing on whole foods, your diet automatically becomes higher in vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals and lower in refined sugar, bad fats, and food additives.

In this section, we take a closer look at what *clean* really means and cover the difference between whole and processed foods. Then we give you six degrees of clean eating so that you can decide what's right for you.

Eating clean doesn't mean cleaning your food before eating it

Eating clean doesn't mean washing all your food, although you certainly do need to rinse produce before adding it to a recipe or eating it raw. The basic principle of this plan is eating whole foods, which include unprocessed fruits and vegetables, lean meats, nuts, seeds, legumes, and whole grains. The *clean* part simply means that the food is unprocessed. In other words, clean, whole foods don't have ingredient labels because they consist of only one ingredient!



TIP

Think of eating clean as cleaning up your life. Just as you'd like to live life in a house free of clutter, you need to remove the clutter from your diet. What makes up the clutter in your diet? Junk foods, refined sugar, additives, preservatives, trans fats, white flour, artificial flavors, and toxins — just to name a few! (Check out Chapter 2 for more details on how to apply eating clean principles to your daily life.)

But following the eating clean plan is more than just choosing to eat whole foods. You get to eat more often, too! Because people will eat anything within reach when they're so hungry it hurts, the eating clean plan involves eating smaller meals plus

at least two snacks throughout the day. Spreading out your food intake helps keep your blood sugar stable, which evens out your mood, improves your concentration on tasks during the day, and can even help reduce the risk of some diseases!



REMEMBER

Essentially, the eating clean plan calls you to do the following:

- » Eat the foods made by nature, not man.
- » Plan to eat five or six meals and snacks throughout the day.
- » Avoid processed foods (in other words, anything in a box with a label).
- » Use healthy cooking methods.
- » Eat before you become super hungry.
- » Stop eating when you're satisfied, not stuffed.
- » Don't count your calories, fat grams, or points.
- » Enjoy your food and appreciate its flavor.

The difference between the eating clean plan and other diets is that this plan is a lifestyle, not a complicated regimen that restricts entire categories of food. With fewer chemicals to deal with, your body becomes better able to concentrate on keeping you healthy.

In Chapters 3 and 4, we explain how eating clean can improve your body on the cellular level. Don't be scared; you don't need a degree in science to use this book and eat clean. But you do need to understand that you literally are what you eat. Your cells, tissues, organs, and entire body will be happier when you eat a great diet.

Comparing whole versus processed foods

To really get a feel for the difference between whole and processed foods, take a look at the following ingredient list. Can you guess what this product is just by reading the ingredients in it?

Water, xylitol, modified food starch, cocoa processed with alkali, milk protein concentrate, hydrogenated vegetable oil, salt, sodium alginate, sucralose, acesulfame potassium, artificial flavor, artificial color

We don't blame you if you have no clue what this food is. It's full of ingredients you don't recognize and can't pronounce, and it's a perfect example of why the eating clean diet is so good for you. After all, why eat this sugar-free instant chocolate pudding mix when you could make your own chocolate pudding with chemical-free, whole ingredients, like milk, eggs, and bittersweet chocolate?

Whole foods are foods that grow in the garden, roam freely on farms, or swim in the sea. Think about the food chain you learned about in science class. Single-celled animals, plants, and plankton are at the bottom. Small fish and other tiny animals eat the single-celled animals, and bigger animals eat the small fish and other tiny animals, and so on up the chain. People (and sharks) are at the top, so everything eaten by the creatures lower on the chain becomes part of the creatures at the top.

To understand all the health benefits of eating clean, you need to consider another food chain: the processed food chain. A plain apple, a handful of chickpeas, or an organic egg are at the bottom. As you move further up the chain, manufacturers manipulate the food until it becomes more artificial ingredients than real food. The foods at the top of this chain include traditional snack foods, fast food, and foods packed with additives, preservatives, and artificial flavors.

Manufacturers end up stripping processed foods of many of their nutrients either to make them easier to combine with other ingredients or to change their characteristics. In contrast, whole foods come to you just as nature intended — bursting with flavor, color, texture, and nutrients.

The foods that are part of the eating clean plan are at the bottom of the processed food chain. They don't have labels, they don't carry preparation instructions, and they certainly don't have ingredient lists. These are the foods that should fill your shopping basket each time you go to the supermarket. (See Chapter 9 for tips on how to stock a clean kitchen and Chapter 20 for a list of clean foods you should always put in your shopping cart.)



TIP

Of course, some processed foods are perfectly acceptable on the eating clean plan. Whole-grain pasta is obviously processed, but it's minimally processed. Read the label; if it lists whole grains, water, and perhaps salt, it's a pretty clean food. Cheese is another processed food, but if you choose a natural cheese that doesn't come loaded with additives and artificial colors, it still fits into the eating clean plan.

Gaining control with six degrees of clean eating

One of the best things about the eating clean plan is that you're in control. In other words, you get to choose how much of the eating clean plan you implement. You can go all out and make 100 percent of your diet clean. Or you can choose to eat an occasional fast-food meal or include some processed foods in your diet. The choice is yours!

Table 1-1 shows the six degrees of clean eating. Take a look at what each degree entails, and think about which one best fits your life.

TABLE 1-1 **The Six Degrees of Clean Eating**

Degree	What You Eat When Following This Degree
20%	At the beginning of your eating clean adventure — or if you're trying to wean kids (or a reluctant spouse) off of a junk food diet — start by changing one meal in a five-day week into a clean meal.
40%	Add another clean meal a week to your plan to continue the eating clean journey. You can also start at this level.
50%	If you want to live an eating clean lifestyle, 50% is really the minimum degree to shoot for. At this level, you get some of the benefits of the eating clean diet plan but can still eat a few fast-food meals and the occasional junk food. Just try to make the nonclean 50% of your diet a bit healthier! Make homemade potato chips instead of eating processed, flavored chips; use multigrain pasta in place of white; and enjoy just one brownie rather than five.
60%	Now you're getting more serious! At this level, most of your foods are clean and unprocessed, but you still eat processed foods two or three days a week. You have to do more cooking, but you're also saving money because you're eating out less and buying fewer processed (and expensive) foods.
80%	Many people stop at this level of clean eating. The vast majority of your meals are clean, using whole, unprocessed foods, but you can still include some bottled pasta sauce and bakery bread in your diet.
100%	Not many people can follow a true clean eating plan all the time, but if you can, bravo! If you've been diagnosed with a serious illness, this level may be the best option for you. Or if you're sick and tired of feeling sick and tired, the pure eating clean plan may help you feel better.

Of course, you can set your target somewhere in between these six degrees. Heck, your plan may vary between 100 percent clean and 60 percent clean within the same day! If you're serious about living the eating clean lifestyle, though, aim for making whole foods the basis for at least 50 percent of your diet. Don't worry about backsliding or falling off the eating clean wagon; just focus on the big picture and enjoy your food and your life. (See Chapter 2 for tips on how to deal with backsliding and get back on the eating clean wagon.)

Considering the Dangers in Processed Foods

Are processed foods really as bad as some people think? In a word, yes. Consider just one example: trans fats. Manufacturers make these fake fats by bubbling hydrogen through liquid oils. Although this process (called *hydrogenation*) sounds like something out of a Frankenstein movie, it's not that complicated. The hydrogen simply transforms the oil into a solid substance. Hydrogenation is a very inexpensive way to make solid fats, which is why food processors love it.

For years, doctors (yes, doctors!) recommended that people eat margarine made with this method rather than butter or simple oils. Now, of course, researchers know that trans fats may be one of the culprits behind America's skyrocketing heart disease rates. The fake fats literally become part of your cell walls, making them flabby and changing their ability to interact with other parts of your body. Nobody wants flabby arms, let alone flabby cell walls!

In this section, we look at some of the preservatives and additives packed into processed foods and explain why you should avoid them. We also consider whether fortified foods are really any better than unfortified foods and explain why breaking the junk food habit is so important to your health.

Preservatives and additives

Surprisingly enough, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) haven't tested many of the preservatives and additives used in processed foods because they're on the Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) list. A chemical's presence on this list means that it has been used for so long (since before 1958) — with no known harmful side effects attached to it — that the FDA allows manufacturers to use it in food without any required testing.

The FDA defines *safe* as “a reasonable certainty in the minds of competent scientists that the substance is not harmful under its intended conditions of use.” That's not exactly a ringing endorsement! And the phrase *intended conditions of use* needs some further explanation; see the nearby sidebar “How many chemicals do you consume?” for details.

The FDA has developed four different classifications of chemicals that manufacturers add to processed food:

- » **Food additives:** This category includes preservatives, flavor enhancers, emulsifiers (calcium stearoyl di lactate, polyglycerol ester, and monoglycerides, among others), vitamins and minerals, and chemicals that control the pH of a product.
- » **GRAS substances:** These products are the ones that have “existing evidence of long and safe use.” These substances have not been tested by the FDA or USDA.
- » **Prior-sanctioned substances:** The FDA or USDA tested and approved these products before the government developed the GRAS list.
- » **Color additives:** This category includes color enhancers and additives.

The FDA doesn't guarantee that the chemicals included in the GRAS list and the prior-sanctioned substances list are safe, but it doesn't test them unless some

new evidence shows that they may be unsafe. You may have heard of the artificial sweetener cyclamate. It was in the GRAS list until testing found that it caused cancer in animals; then the FDA removed it from the list.



WARNING

The FDA has removed some chemicals from the market. Red Dye #2 and Violet #1, for example, were removed from the market after Congress passed the 1960 Color Additive Amendment. Before the amendment passed, manufacturers used 200 food dyes; less than 35 of those dyes passed the testing process and were declared safe. So how much damage was done by the 165 unsafe food dyes? Think of it this way: Some manufacturers used to put lead in butter to give it that beautiful yellow color or chalk in milk to make it look thick and creamy!

Many people, especially those who eat clean, don't want to wait for some food additive, pesticide, or preservative to be declared dangerous retroactively. They'd rather take control of what they put into their bodies and consume as few of these chemicals as possible — through the eating clean diet, of course! (Find out more about these chemicals in Chapters 2 and 9.)

Of course, a few preservatives and additives may be perfectly safe if consumed in small amounts. But many people really don't like the phrase *may be*. Do you really want to be a guinea pig in a huge experiment conducted on the population? If you want to gain more confidence about the safety of the foods you eat, give the eating clean plan a try and avoid processed, refined, and packaged foods as much as you can.

HOW MANY CHEMICALS DO YOU CONSUME?

One of the problems connected with the chemicals in your food is how much of each particular food you consume. If your diet consists mainly of fast food and the amount of hormones in that beef burger you love is considered "safe in a reasonable diet" but you eat 400 hamburgers a year, you're going to ingest more than the amount of hormones the FDA approved. Similarly, if you love asparagus, eat it three times a week, and can't afford to buy organically grown produce, you'll be getting more than the studied dose of pesticides used to grow that particular product.

To reduce your exposure to preservatives, additives, and other chemicals added to food, vary what you eat. Don't subsist on fried chicken and roasted potatoes. Add different types of fresh fruits and vegetables, even if they aren't grown organically, and you can reduce your exposure to many chemicals. (See Chapter 10 for everything you need to know about incorporating organic foods into your diet.)

Label claims (also known as marketing hype)

Many processed foods have lots of claims plastered all over their labels. “Fortified with calcium!” “Strengthens your immune system!” and “Made with real fruit!” are just some of the banners you see on packaged foods these days. But what, if anything, do these claims mean?

Many fortified foods have only some (key word *some*) of the nutrients that manufacturers removed during processing added back in. For instance, a cereal made from white flour may have vitamins and fiber added back in. But the amounts added back in aren’t even close to 100 percent of what was removed in the first place. The process to turn the wheat grain into white flour permanently strips out many of those nutrients.

Although eating fortified foods is better than eating unfortified foods, it’s not as good as eating the whole foods in the first place. Unfortunately, many people blissfully put these fortified products in their shopping baskets, unaware that many of the claims on the packages have no real meaning.

The FDA does regulate some label claims, but many companies change a word or two to get around these regulations. Then the claim becomes misleading. For example, most flavored strawberry juices don’t actually contain strawberries. The “real fruit” you see on the label claim is actually pear concentrate, and the “strawberry” is present only in the form of artificial flavoring.

The following list presents some common label claims and explains what they actually mean:

- » **Made with organic ingredients:** Only 70 percent of the ingredients in the food must be grown organically. (See Chapter 10 for a lot more details about organic foods.)
- » **High or rich in . . . :** These food products must have 20 percent of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of the nutrient in question per serving.
- » **Zero trans fats:** The product can contain up to 0.5 grams of artificial trans fats per serving. But be aware that if you eat more than one serving, those partial grams can add up fast.
- » **More, fortified, enriched:** For this designation, the product must contain 10 percent of the RDA of the nutrient in question per serving or more than a similar product contains.
- » **Natural:** This claim means the product can’t contain anything synthetic. But it can still be high in sodium, fats, and sugars.

» **Made with whole wheat:** This claim doesn't mean that the food contains no refined grain products. In fact, the food has to contain only a tiny amount of whole wheat to legally use this label.

Understandably, these claims can confuse consumers. The claims don't tell you about substances that you may need or want to avoid; you have to read the ingredient list for that information. Funny how these claims, when clearly explained, don't seem as wonderful as you'd think! If a food has "more vitamin A" but the "more" is only 10 percent of your RDA and the food has enough sodium to put you over your limit for the day, is it really a healthy choice?

Overall, eating foods without labels is less complicated and better for you. When you buy whole, unlabeled foods, you can be pretty sure that what you see is what you get.

Junk food addiction

The term *junk food junkie* used to be pretty popular in the American lexicon. People used it as a joke, but unfortunately, that term is very accurate because junk food is actually quite addictive.

Consider this: A study published in *Nature Neuroscience* found that your brain reacts to junk food just like it does to addictive drugs like heroin. Kind of scary, right? You've likely seen pictures of heroin addicts, who will do anything for that next hit.

One of the most dangerous things about addiction is that over time, the addict has to consume more and more of the addictive substance to create the same amount of pleasure in the addict's brain. That fact is what causes the death of many drug addicts; eventually they overdose.

That fact is also what can cause the illness and death of junk food junkies; eventually the ever-increasing consumption of empty calories, lots of sugar, refined ingredients, sodium, and artificial additives wear out the body. With little or no vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals to help the body repair itself, junk food junkies eventually come to the end of the line and develop a disease. To think that manufacturers actually develop junk foods to be as addictively appealing as possible!



REMEMBER

The eating clean plan helps remove your addiction to junk food simply by substituting whole foods that are healthy and nutritious for the unhealthy, addictive junk foods. This process takes time, though, so don't think you'll find an easy way out of the junk food maze. But you can get out of it, and with some thought and

effort, you can get your family off the junk food treadmill, too. One of the best things about the eating clean lifestyle is that the more you follow it, the better you feel, so you get on an upward spiral toward good health rather than a downward spiral into sickness.

Surveying the Benefits of Eating Clean

So other than containing clean, natural ingredients rather than artificial chemicals, what can clean, whole foods do for you? Eating a clean diet can help you live longer, make you stronger, prevent disease, and maybe even treat some diseases. These claims may sound like one of those late-night infomercials, but they're all true — backed up with scientific research conducted by real doctors wearing lab coats!

In this section, we look at how you can use the eating clean lifestyle to obtain and maintain good health. We discuss how to eat clean to lose weight, to prevent disease, and to lead the longest, most active life you can. (See Chapter 6 for more on losing weight and living a longer, healthier life and Chapters 7 and 8 for more on disease prevention and management.)

Overall good health

If you've been blessed with good health, you're lucky. After all, your genes do play a part in whether or not you develop disease. But scientists estimate that 310,000 to 580,000 deaths in the United States every year are caused by an unhealthy diet and lack of physical exercise. After all, your diet has a very real effect on your health:

- » Diet causes up to one-third of all cancers.
- » Poor diet causes most cases of obesity.
- » A diet based on processed foods, junk foods, and refined foods is a major risk factor for developing heart disease.
- » Not getting enough vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals in your diet puts you at greater risk for catching infectious diseases.
- » Eating too much sugar, alcohol, and bad fat can reduce the efficiency of your immune system.

JUNK FOODS: FAKE EVERYTHING

You know that junk foods contain artificial colors and flavors, along with sugar and salt to increase their addictive qualities. But do you know that junk food manufacturers also manipulate texture? Texture and flavor are the two big players in food's appeal. Emulsifiers, two or three trips into the frying pan, thickeners, fats, and stabilizers increase the *mouthfeel*, or texture, of processed foods. In other words, manufacturers artificially manipulate their foods to make them more pleasing to your mouth. This artificial mouthfeel gives junk food an advantage over regular food, so you tend to crave it more than whole foods. After you realize that the whole mouthfeel is just as artificial as the ingredients, you may be able to say no the next time you crave a triple-fried cheese doodle. Try a crisp apple or some cauliflower instead.

The eating clean plan can help you stay as healthy as you can be by putting your dietary focus on whole foods that pack a nutritional punch. No matter what the current state of your health is, you can feel better and get healthier if you ditch the refined, overly processed foods and start concentrating on eating healthy foods.

The characteristics of overall good health are

- » Stamina
- » Normal body weight
- » Normal blood pressure
- » Good blood cholesterol counts and other normal blood parameters
- » A healthy heart
- » Good digestion
- » Clear skin
- » Mental acuity

Overall good health has many more markers, of course, but the point is that good health isn't perfection. It isn't about achieving a model's body or looking like your favorite movie star. Good health means that your body is able to do what you want it to do, whether that's to hike Mount Annapurna or take a walk around the block.

Weight loss and disease prevention

More than 60 percent of all Americans are overweight. Even with messages about nutrition being blasted all day long, through every form of media, Americans are getting more and more overweight. What's going on?

Many nutritionists think the problem is what's in the food most people eat. Your body wasn't made to use all the chemicals and artificial ingredients packed into much of the American diet. And it certainly wasn't made to consume as much sodium, fake fat, and sugar as many people do today. Plus, your body was made to efficiently process food and store fat since your ancestors couldn't guarantee that they'd get three square meals a day. When Americans are faced with unlimited quantities of food available 24 hours a day, something has to give. Often, that something is their waistbands.



REMEMBER

The key to healthy, sustained weight loss is to gradually lose weight by eating a nutrient-dense diet of filling foods, which is exactly what the eating clean plan is all about. On the plan, you eat more often and you eat foods that are satisfying and very nutritious. After you get into the clean eating plan, you really won't have any more room in your life (or your stomach) for the junk food that made you overweight in the first place!

Remember the thousands of deaths caused every year by poor diet and lack of exercise that we talk about in the preceding section? Well, people don't die because of a poor diet; they die because of the diseases caused (or exacerbated) by that poor diet. Those diseases include

- » Heart disease
- » Cancer
- » Diabetes
- » Hypertension
- » Stroke
- » Autoimmune diseases
- » Osteoporosis

Disease occurs when something goes wrong in your body. Cells grow too fast, and your body is so busy filtering toxins that it takes longer to respond to infection. Over time, these factors can lead to a serious disease.

In Chapter 7, we focus on how to eat to reduce your risk of developing certain diseases. After all, what you eat has a direct impact on your disease risk. Then in

Chapter 8, we discuss how to eat to help manage certain diseases after you already have them.



REMEMBER

The eating clean diet really is the model for eating to prevent disease. One of its main focuses is on getting plenty of phytochemicals, which help prevent inflammation, keep your immune system strong, and keep your cardiovascular system running smoothly. The only way to get your phytochemicals is to eat lots of whole fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and grains.

A longer, more active life

A good motto for the eating clean life is “It’s not only the years in your life, but the life in your years!” Everyone wants to live a long life, of course, but if that life is full of preventable pain, disease, and suffering, all bets are off. Living a long life should mean being able to easily walk up stairs, walk around the block, and participate in active hobbies well into your 80s and 90s.

Fortunately, the eating clean diet can help you do just that! If you’re blessed with basically good health, eating whole foods prepared in a clean way is one of the best ways to keep yourself healthy. Of course, no diet can guarantee good health or a long life. But you can tip the odds in your favor with the eating clean plan.

