

How to be 'healthy' foods savvy

Susan Burke March, author of *Making Weight Control Second Nature: Living Thin Naturally*, advises consumers to read food labels carefully.

Explain why "natural" foods aren't always natural.

In the quest to find foods to nourish, do you purchase foods labeled "100% Natural," "Healthy," or "No Artificial Ingredients" without reading the ingredients? We're at a disadvantage compared with countries such as Canada, where labeling laws are more stringent and specific. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says the "natural" claim means that the food does not contain artificial ingredients, coloring or chemical preservatives, and, in the case of meat and poultry, is minimally processed. However, the meat may be full of "natural flavors," and "naturally raised" doesn't assure consumers the animal has access to pasture. I picked up a can of iced tea whose label read "100% Natural Tea." The ingredients included filtered water, tea, high fructose corn syrup and lemon flavoring.

What does multigrain mean?

From breads to crackers, from hot to cold cereal, "multigrain" does not mean whole grain — it means only that the product contains an undefined amount of different types of grains. The first ingredient should be "100% whole grain" so you're assured you're getting all of the good nutrition from that grain's kernel, including vitamin E, magnesium and fiber. Some packages distract the consumer by touting impressive amounts of vitamins and

minerals, even fiber. But, be savvy and look at the ingredients first. Always read the ingredients, then serving size, then the calories per serving, how much fiber and then how much sugar per serving. For example, a serving of shredded wheat and bran mini wheats is 1¼ cup, has 200 calories, 7 grams of fiber and less than 1 gram of sugar.

Explain the significance of organic.

The true meaning of organic is you're getting an item grown on ecologically friendly soil, without contamination of potentially harmful chemicals. Not surprisingly, organically grown foods may have a higher amount of bacteria and pests than food grown conventionally. Much of the added expense of organic is from the higher production costs. Growing and harvesting of organic food is more labor-intensive and requires more land. No studies prove that organically grown foods have superior taste or more nutrition. But there is no doubt that fresh foods, not doused with chemical fertilizers and pesticides, are appealing. Supporting the small farmers whose livelihoods depend upon local support is a good thing, and keeps pressure on the USDA to limit the amount of chemicals in our food. Surveys show consumers trust the safety of foods sold in their local stores. However, consumers should be aware that some produce

has unreasonable levels of pesticide residue. Even if you wash your produce, pesticide residue may remain.

What healthy foods contain unhealthy additives?

A healthy food will have a

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What to eat



Susan Burke March,
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very short ingredient list, not a long, unpronounceable one. For example, there is no fruit in "Froot Loops" cereal. But flip over the package to the ingredient list and the first one is sugar. What follows is a long list, but there's no fruit. Yes, there are fruit flavors and artificial colors, and although the front of the label reads "a good source of fiber," this is a less healthy choice than a whole-grain cereal. Get children used to the taste of real food, then allow them to add some sugar if desired. Sweeten naturally with dried and fresh fruit, which, after all, has real nutrition and great taste.

—Dawn House

