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Opening Extract from...

What to Eat and How to Eat It

99 Super Ingredients for a Healthy Life

Written by Renée Elliott

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Foreword



I question convention. Not to be awkward or difficult, but because I have come to believe that just because many people are doing something does not make it a Good Idea.

This started when I was little and really wanted to do something that my parents didn't. After several ineffective arguments, I tried the old, 'But mom, everyone else is...' which my mother quickly countered with, 'If everyone jumped off a bridge, would you?' This, repeated through my teen years, was frustrating and annoying.

But I am a thoughtful person. I grew up. By the time I reached 19 and had started to realise that everything isn't as it seems, I was beginning to agree with her. As part of my nutrition degree at university, I had read a book about the horrors of the American beef industry and realised that the pretty pieces of meat in the little packets from the supermarket were not as harmless as they appeared.

The label said nothing about the intensity of beef production, the routine overuse of antibiotics, the growth promoters, the cheap and inappropriate feed, the lack of outdoor grazing and basically the absence of a fairly normal life for a cow. So I promptly became a vegetarian, as organic meat was not an option then. This wasn't because I did not want it, but because I no longer saw conventional meat as healthy food.

I had trusted that someone was looking out for me, ensuring that if food was for sale, then it was good for me. Not just not harmful, but GOOD for me. I suddenly realised how naïve that was. Now I do my own research. Needless to say, I don't take my health advice from the government. They don't appreciate ancient wisdom or modern nutritionists, and because they look after the masses, their advice is often fear-based, like 'bean sprouts are dangerous', and broad, like 'eat less fat'. Neither of which is accurate or helpful.

So I developed a questioning attitude in earnest. And I learned. I learned that food is farmed, processed, refined and distributed in some ways that have nothing to do with whether it is good for you. Instead, these practices are to make food last longer than it should, taste better than it does, look brighter than it can. And this has nothing to do with whether or not it is good for us. There are actually many people in the food chain who don't care about your health. I do.

Over the years, I concluded that 'conventional wisdom' is not always smart. And I looked for another way. I care about my health, and as a child of the Sixties I have a huge sense of social responsibility so I care about other people's health, too. In time, I forged my path and opened Planet Organic to provide another way to shop. We sell the best-quality foods in order 'to promote health in the community'. This is my mission.

Introduction

My Mission

Having studied health and nutrition since 1982, I have concluded that many of the illnesses that plague us today, such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease in all of its forms, are the result of poor eating habits. And I believe the six main culprits, contrary to what the government may propose, are the following:

1. Junk food and fizzy soft drinks
2. Refined carbohydrates, including:
   white sugar – especially if combined with
   white flour white wheat flour in all of its guises
   refined grains like white rice
3. Too much bad fat, including:
   hydrogenated fat
   partially hydrogenated fats
   polyunsaturated fats
4. Poor-quality meat
5. Farmed fish
6. Chemicals in our food and body-care products

Most of what I do fits my mission: 'To promote health in the community'. I have been on that mission publicly since 1995, but privately it's motivated me for a great deal longer, probably even through my childhood and education while I was observing, studying, researching and learning. I opened Planet Organic in November 1995 as an antidote to conventional supermarkets: to provide the best-quality food and give people the choice of health.

Fast-forward to June 2006, when I made a new friend named Allison. As an American transplanted to London, she was already a shopper at Planet Organic. Alison, said, 'I stand there staring at barley on the Planet Organic shelf. I know I should eat it, but I'm not sure what is the best way to cook it.' Maybe you have bought coconut oil because you know you should use it, but it's been sitting in the cupboard getting old because you're not using it quickly enough? Perhaps you keep finding beetroot in your organic veg box and can't be bothered to look up a recipe? Or you find yourself staring at baobab powder in your local health-food store and can't remember why you're supposed to eat it.

This was the seed of the idea for this book. But at the time, sales of cookbooks were declining as more and more people went online for recipes. Today, though, that trend has reversed: with so many bloggers and so much information online, it's become difficult and time-consuming to sift through the mass and find valuable and reliable data and recipes.

The time feels right for an authoritative reference book and cookbook based on all that I have learned about food and ingredients over these 30 years.

So here it is. What you should eat and – oh so importantly – how you should eat it. When you arrive home after a busy day, do you want to search countless websites because you heard someone say that quinoa should be soaked, or something you can't quite remember, and the recipe you're reading online doesn't mention this, so...?

Quite simply, I take you through the best ways to eat the most wonderful ingredients. You don't have to follow best practice always, but mostly is good.

I set out options that save time when preparing ingredients. And I avoid many of the time-consuming and largely unnecessary pre-steps, like pre-steaming vegetables or sautéing, that so many chefs seem to have time for but I certainly don't. Some of these steps also diminish the nutritional value of ingredients because they end up being overcooked in the final dish.

I like the whole food and I don't like waste, so I'll never say, for example, scoop out the tomato seeds – because what are you then supposed to do with them other than throw them away? So I'll recommend that you eat the broccoli stem and leaves, and include the cauliflower leaves in with your roasted cauli and garlic.

Eating well is so unavoidably important. My progress on this path has taken time and thoughtfulness. A major turning point for me came when I was pregnant and read in a pregnancy book to make every mouthful count. The book advised me to have one little treat a week like a wholegrain carrot muffin and one big treat a month like a honking piece of cake. That made so much sense to me that I decided to always make every mouthful count. And that's what this book is all about.

How to use this book

This book takes 99 brilliant ingredients and helps you use them in the best way possible, while making it as easy as possible for you to do so.

Why These 99 Ingredients?
This is not a definitive list of everything that's healthy for you, nor is it a list of the only foods that you should eat. It is basically foods that you should eat if you don't already, and foods that you could eat more of. It's a mix of great, ordinary ingredients that you may be taking for granted – like apples, nuts and beans – and ingredients you may have heard of but haven't yet included in your diet – like miso, spelt and sumac. Plus some superfoods that may have little or no supporting research, but have been held in esteem in different cultures for decades or centuries, like goji berries, acai and maca.

I have arranged the ingredients mostly by their biological and taxonomical groupings, some of which may be unfamiliar to you. So to help you quickly find what you're looking for, I have included an index of ingredients on page 21. The book offers a broad mix of recipes for breakfast, lunch, dinner, soups, sides, dessert and drinks, with lots and lots of ideas for other ways to use and eat these wonderful foods. You'll also find a useful at-a-glance recipe index on page 22, in addition to a general index at the back of the book.

For most of the ingredients, there are clearly defined sections on benefits, ways to eat them and how to use them (and, where relevant, why it's best to go organic), although the format does vary a little from ingredient to ingredient, depending on its qualities.

Benefits
This book is not meant to be an encyclopaedia. It doesn't list all of the benefits an ingredient has. Instead, I have tried to emphasise the main highlight of a food – the reason it is in the book. I tried not to continually list the impressive vitamins, minerals and nutrients in each ingredient, as I know that to many people this is fairly meaningless. But I have done so more than I intended, because for so many of these foods, the list is just so exciting.

The Organic Advantage
Although I eat everything organically and wish the whole world would, I understand that it's not everyone's priority. One of the questions I'm most frequently asked is, 'If I don't buy everything organically, what should I focus on?' The answer is as follows:

- whole grains
- meat, dairy and eggs
- whatever you or your kids eat the most of

As you go through the book, the first two are reflected in individual pages. The last, you can decide for yourself, but to help you I have highlighted the products that are most heavily sprayed in the United Kingdom and America. For now, the lists are as follows. They change a little year to year, but you can look them up.

Pesticide Action UK's List:

apricots • apples • beans in a pod • carrots • cereal grains • citrus, soft (clementine, mandarin, minneola/tangelo, nova, satsuma) • courgettes and marrows • cucumber • dried fruit • flour, wholegrain • grapes • herbs • lettuce • nectarines and peaches • parsnips • peas in a pod • pears • pineapple • rice • strawberries • sweet potatoes • tomatoes • yams

Environmental Working Group US List, with the worst at the top:

strawberries • apples • nectarines • peaches • celery • grapes • cherries • spinach • tomatoes • sweet (bell) peppers • cherry tomatoes • cucumber • hot peppers • kale and collard greens

It is widely thought that the following are also heavily sprayed and should be purchased organically as well:

- berries
- spring greens and leafy greens

Ways to Eat
This incredibly useful section suggests different ways to use an ingredient. So, if you've decided to use almonds more and have bought a big organic pack, you'll find many ideas and ways to include almonds in your diet – and help you finish that bag. Sometimes these are simple recipe ideas and other times they are suggested dishes for you to try, with the understanding that you will be able to look up those recipes in other books or on the internet.

How to Use
Because friends and acquaintances know that I'm, well... a food freak, I am constantly asked questions like, 'Should I soak chia? Is it okay if I don't', and so on. There are so many voices out there, that it's not always easy to find someone who knows their stuff, so this book is a practical 'how to' handbook.

This section includes how to get the most nutrition from the ingredient that you're eating. This may mean eating it raw or cooked. Or that you need to soak it. Or that it should be cooked below a certain temperature or for a maximum amount of time.

There are also general tips like not to store tomatoes in the fridge because they go spongy, and to leave the peel on sweet potatoes to utilise all the fibre and nutrients, and that seeds and nuts are best eaten soaked and raw or dehydrated.

These tips are to help you understand the best way to eat a food, although you may not always want to eat it that way, which is fine. For example, blueberries are best eaten raw. But I love pie, and you may too, so it's not meant to stop you from making blueberry pie. The idea is to support you in educating yourself about foods so you can make informed choices. If you have a sweet tooth, for example, it's better to eat blueberry pie than a chocolate bar.

The Recipes
I've included at least one main recipe or recipe idea for every ingredient. Where an ingredient requires some extra preparation before it can be used in a recipe, such as activating a nut or a seed, for example, I have provided a short Base Recipe in addition to the main one.

I know that time is precious, so most of my recipes take 30 minutes or less. But as I have had family and friends double- or triple-test recipes in the book, I've found that some people are quicker or faster because of how quickly they chop or because they throw stuff in a food processor. So, the specified times are just a guide. Please don't yell at me if the Turmeric Scramble takes you 20 minutes instead of 15!

Some useful points about the recipes:

- Tablespoon and teaspoon measures are not the utensils you eat with, but are measuring spoons that can be bought in good kitchen shops or online. The same goes for cups.
- All vegetables are medium unless specified otherwise.
- Butter is salted.

When you have bought the ingredients listed and are ready to make something, do this:

Put ingredients on the worktop.
Prep ingredients.
Follow method.
Read through ingredients at the end to ensure you've included everything.

Finally, you'll make beautiful food for a beautiful you. A little attention to the table creates peace and beauty that add to your eating experience, whether you are on your own, having an intimate meal for two or are feeding a chaotic family of five. When time is more relaxed, I try to lay the tablecloth, napkins, fruit water jug, fresh flowers and candles. But even when I'm in a hurry, a little jar with whatever I can find in the garden – like a sprig of rosemary and a few dandelions – still makes all the difference.

Crispy Kale

You can make this in your oven or in a dehydrator if you have one. Crispy kale is a super-nutritious and delicious snack that can be munched on before a meal, as a side or as an afternoon snack. Move over crisps, for this inexpensive and nutritionally exceptional food.

Serves: 4
Prep: 10 minutes
Cook: 30–40 minutes

100g/3½oz kale, washed and roughly chopped
2–3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
¼ tsp fine sea salt

Spin the kale dry or leave to dry as water makes it soggy in the oven. When the kale is ready, turn the oven on to 50°C/120°F or its lowest setting.

Put the kale in a large bowl, add the oil and salt and toss well or rub the oil onto the leaves to help evenly coat with oil. Bake for 30–40 minutes until crispy.

Kale & Spinach Patties

These have a lot more spinach in them than kale, but they are so great and so green that they are included here. These make a tasty dinner, served with salads or sides. You can omit the Parmesan for a dairy-free version, but increase the sea salt a bit to compensate.

Serves: 4
Prep: 30 minutes
Cook: 10 minutes per batch

400g/14oz frozen chopped spinach
150g/5½ oz/½ cup fresh wholegrain breadcrumbs
60g/2¼oz finely chopped kale
60g/2¼oz finely chopped onion
60g/2¼oz grated Parmesan cheese (optional)
5 large eggs, beaten with a fork
½ tsp fine sea salt
pinch of cayenne pepper
2 tbsp healthy oil

In a large bowl, add the spinach, breadcrumbs, kale, onion, Parmesan, if using, eggs, salt and cayenne pepper and mix until combined.

Heat the oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat. Once hot, drop dessertspoons of the mixture into the pan. Cook for 5 minutes on each side until browned and crisp.





Chilli Chicken

This dish has a depth of flavour that belies the brief time it takes to make it and is visually beautiful, as well. Serve with wholegrain rice for the gorgeous sauce. If you don't want the chicken skin, remove it, and then add the chicken after you mix the other ingredients in the pan. Push the chicken into the sauce and then cook.

Serves: 4
Prep: 10 minutes
Cook: 50 minutes

2 tsp cumin seeds
4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
4 chicken breasts or thighs
200g/7oz spinach
2 tomatoes, chopped
1½ tsp ground chilli powder
1½ tsp fine sea salt
2 garlic cloves, chopped
cooked wholegrain rice, to serve

In a large frying pan, dry-fry the cumin seeds over a medium heat for 3–5 minutes until toasted, then transfer to a bowl while you cook the chicken.

Add 2 tablespoons of the oil to the hot pan and fry the chicken, skin-side down, for 3–5 minutes until the skin is brown, then remove from the pan and set aside.

Reduce the heat to low and add the remaining oil to the pan. Add the spinach, tomatoes, chilli powder, salt and toasted cumin seeds and mix well. Transfer the chicken back to the pan (push the pieces down into the sauce) and cook, covered, for 25 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 10 minutes until the chicken is cooked through. Serve the chilli chicken with the cooked rice.