

## PERSONAL HEALTH

# How to Separate the Good From the Bad in Choosing What to Eat

**A new book pushes you to question what you're eating and gives you the tools to do something about it.**

By **Stefanie Sacks, MS, CNS, CDN** /

January 30, 2015

Tarcher/Penguin





24 COMMENTS

The following is an excerpt from Stefanie Sacks' new book, *What the Fork Are You Eating? An Action Plan for Your Pantry and Plate* (Tarcher, 2014).


Having immersed myself in the world of food, nutrition, and health since the ripe age of fifteen, I have been there, done that—raw, vegan, vegetarian, macrobiotic, special medical diets including cleanses, and yes (I am ashamed to say so), even fad diets. Let's call it my years of necessary research. As a result, I am proud that I have become a true *moderationist*—I don't follow any one food theory or fad, I don't eat 100 percent organic, I eat some packaged foods and I eat not-so-healthy foods once in a while (a good potato chip is my



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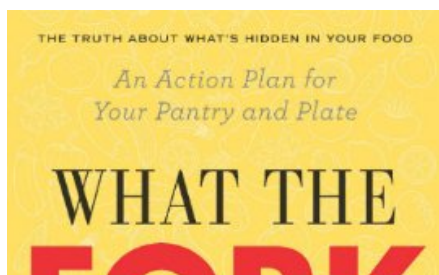
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vice, even the occasional gummy bear—more on this later). But at the same time, I practice no-nonsense nutrition—meaning I don't buy into any of the hype; I believe in real food, not phony food (as in highly processed food); and I tell it like it is, always coming from a place of facts and basic logic.

Suffering from asthma, allergies, recurring bronchitis, and pneumonia shaped much of my childhood, and I was determined to find an alternative to the multiple inhalers, allergy meds, steroids, and antibiotics I regularly consumed. In a nutshell, the medications that were supposed to be helping me were actually destroying me. Based on my experience as a summer chef in my local Montauk health food café, I discovered ways I could use food to help me heal. Challenged to the core, but finally getting well, I learned two things that shaped my life as I now know it:

- I truly understood the power food has to influence a body's ability to heal, recover from chronic illness, and stay well. □
- I began questioning why more people didn't know this, and if they did, I wondered whether they would have the knowledge and skills to make the shift I did. □

As I figured out how to turn my food passion and fascination into a career, I also discovered my mission: to teach what I'd learned in my idiosyncratic no-nonsense nutritionist way. □



I am a culinary nutritionist—a certified chef with a master's of science □ degree in nutrition from Columbia University. I am also a certified nutrition specialist (CNS)



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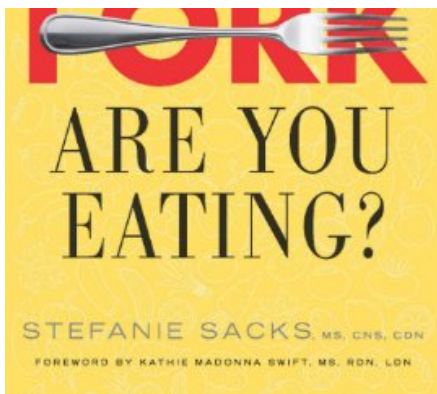


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Book cover of "What the Fork Are You Eating?" by Stefanie Sacks. [Click to enlarge.](#) [cher/Penguin](#)

and a certified dietitian nutritionist (CDN). Many clients call me a “food therapist.” A doctor who suggests dietary change as a part of the “prescription for healing” typically hands over a single sheet offering minimal guidance. I work with clients to take this “nutrition prescription”

into the kitchen—we chat, shop, and cook, as I aim to do with you in this book. ☐

*What the Fork* is an easy and digestible read starting with the top-rated terminators (things in your food or being done to your food that are just not cool)—what they are, why they are “bad,” and how to avoid them ☐with the better-for-you alternatives (to whet your appetite for your trip to the market in Section Three). Then let’s feng shui your food with pantry ☐rehab before I help you navigate the grocery store, from decoding nutrition facts, ingredient lists, health claims, and funny (and not-so-funny) food lingo to aisle-by-aisle actionables in Supermarket Strategies. And last but not least, learn to love what you eat in meal rehab—you’ll get tips on how to balance your plate as well as recipes to die for. ☐

I am not a doctor or dietitian drilling down on a weight-loss solution; I am not offering a polemic on a food system gone awry (though you will get ☐some serious insight on that here). Rather my intention is to

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give you enough information to push you to question *What the Fork* you are eating while also giving you the tools to start to do something about it. Never forget that small changes in food choice can make big everyday differences. I promote a more conscious way of choosing food—what could be bad about that? □

## The Terminators

Did you know that people today consume five times more food dye than they did thirty years ago? How about that most artificial vanilla flavoring (including what is found in some bottles of “vanilla” extract) is made from wood pulp? Or that chemical preservatives such as sulfur dioxide, which are commonly used in dried fruit, fruit juices, and molasses, can cause an asthmatic reaction in many? Have you heard about the chemical flavor enhancer MSG (monosodium glutamate)? Although it’s been used prevalently in your food supply for more than a hundred years, it can cause MSG symptom complex, the symptoms of which include chest pain, difficulty breathing, headache, and nausea.

These are just some of the TRTs. They are pervasive and not going away anytime soon. So if you have any interest in doing better than you are right now when it comes to the foods you choose and your health, it is your job as a consumer to know what the TRTs are, why they are “bad,” and what the Better for You Alternatives are, so you can make a conscious choice to consume or avoid.

While there is plenty of science to question the safety of most if not all of the TRTs, there is not enough to deem them unsafe for human consumption—meaning a cease-and-desist on their use in anything

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edible. So full disclosure: Some studies assure us that many of these TRTs (and other foodstuffs) are harmless, but I tend to pay more attention to the studies that raise significant questions about whether consumption can lead to mild to severe health problems. Clearly you know where my bias lies, but look at it this way—why take a risk with your body and your health, or perhaps more importantly, with that of your loved ones? I prefer to teach my clients how to eat safely. Based on my experience working with people to prevent or manage illness through food, I can honestly tell you that everybody I have worked with feels better after removing (or greatly limiting) the TRTs from the foods they eat. And here's your chance to do the same. While I am by no measure going to hit every "no-no" ingredient in food, let's consider the TRTs—chemical preservatives, artificial flavors and enhancers, artificial colors, artificial sweeteners, sugar and its many euphemisms, trans fats (hydrogenated oils), chemical pesticides, antibiotics, hormones, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs)—a great starting point to reshape your relationship with your eats.

*Stefanie Sacks is a culinary nutritionist, author and educator. She is the author of [What the Fork Are You Eating?](#) (Tarcher/Penguin Random House). Her blog, [What The Fork Weekly](#) features her [Stirring the Pot](#) radio show, which airs on Hamptons NPR, [WPPB 88.3FM](#) and via podcast.*

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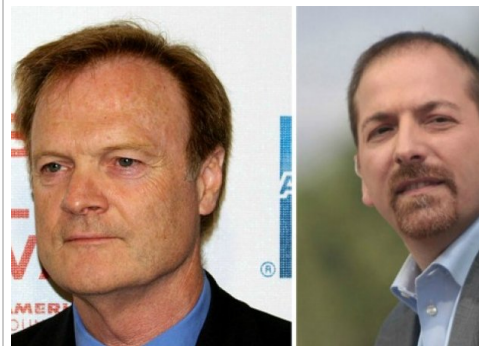
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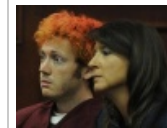
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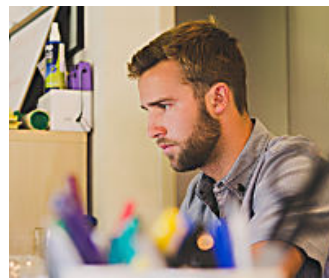
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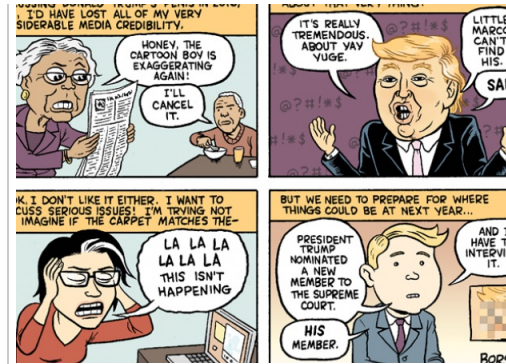
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