

**“Food and Healing,”** By Annemarie Colbin

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Annemarie Colbin’s message in her book, “Food and Healing” can be distilled down to one morsel: There is a direct correlation between the food we eat and our general state of well-being – eating well is the key to living well.

While this message may sound familiar, Colbin’s approach is not. The book is a guide to making healthy food choices, yet Colbin does not recommend any particular diet. There are no food pyramids or USDA recommended daily amounts. In fact, Colbin believes that no one diet may be appropriate throughout the course of a person’s lifetime. It is the individual’s responsibility to pay attention to their body’s signals and choose food accordingly.

Instead of promoting a single diet or style of eating (vegetarianism, veganism, macrobiotics etc.) Colbin gives her readers the tools to make informed decisions about the foods they eat. She challenges many of our cultures underlying assumptions about food in terms of what is healthy and what is not. For example, Colbin expounds upon the benefits of eating whole foods, not only because of the micronutrients contained in the food but because of subtle energies or life force as well. (Life force can also be translated as qi, chi, prana or bio-energy, as Colbin explains it, as long as the reader understands that the energy from the food is nourishing our own energy fields.)

As part of a living ecosystem, she says, humans should be consuming foods that the ecosystem provides in as close to their natural state as possible. Thus, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, unrefined cereal grains and sea vegetables can be seen as whole foods. She includes animals that could be eaten by one person in a single sitting (like oysters, smelt, small birds etc.) or animals that might be eaten by a tribe over the course of a few days in this category as well. However, items such as wheat germ, juice, skim milk, butter, or tofu, as well as meats without the bones and oils, fats or vitamin supplements are only partial foods. (p.38)

The more partial foods we eat, the more unbalanced we will become as our bodies attempt and fail to compensate for the lack of wholeness in our diet. In promoting what she calls a holistic model of how the human system functions, Colbin makes the following declarations: (p.31-32)

- Each human being has a general sense of whether his or her system is in good working order. The sense that something is wrong is usually correct
- Malfunctions of the organism can stem from physical, psychological, or spiritual events. Cures are effected by finding the underlying cause and correcting it; the immune system takes over from there. The physical and nonphysical are equally real

- A healthy organism will tend to correct its own minor imbalances if allowed to do so; medical treatment may often interfere with that self-healing ability
- Symptoms are a message from the body about its conditions and its function. The same condition may give rise to symptoms of different kinds: conversely, different conditions may cause similar symptoms.
- Cures of major disease may occur because the immune system is sufficiently strong, perhaps supported by a change in diet or by psychological or spiritual renewal.
- Food is a direct cause of the proper or improper functioning of the organism.
- Quality, quantity, stored energy, taste, color, aroma, and texture of food all have physiological and psychological effects on the organism.
- The organism reacts to and interacts with its natural environment; climate, season, altitude, and weather all affect it.

This is in stark contrast to the mechanistic view of the body that often labels symptoms as the disease without looking at the underlying cause. A mechanistic view may also disregard the effects of the natural environment and it fails to incorporate the role of food in maintaining a healthy body unless it's due to eating too little (or too much) of a certain type of food or nutrient. With the life force of the food under consideration, Colbin provides a discussion on the effects of various methods of food preservation, making a distinction between traditional methods - cold storage, drying, fermenting, pickling and smoking – and the more modern methods - freezing, canning, chemical preservation and irradiation.

In her estimation, the life force is maintained using traditional methods, while the modern methods often result in food devoid of energy. She relates the experience of one of her clients who fell asleep right after a lunch of mushroom barley soup. While the soup did not make her client sleepy the first time she ate it, the frozen version did. Colbin generally stays away from canned foods as well, since in her experience, they offer little or no energy. She strongly advises against eating any foods with chemical additives, as many of these substances act by eliminating the life force within the food substances. And, chemical additives have also been linked to a host of other problems, such as allergies, cancer, hyperactivity, and immune disorders.

The bulk of the book is devoted to evaluating different foods based upon multiple criteria:

- Using human mother's milk as a benchmark, Colbin looks at compositions of many foods, focusing on the balance of vitamins and minerals, proteins, fats, carbohydrates and water. Colbin demonstrates how a seemingly well-nourished individual may show up with deficiency symptoms, not only from a lack of a particular nutrient but from excess as well. For example, too much white sugar (composition – carbohydrate only) will draw on the body's own protein and mineral resources, thereby weakening it.
- Colbin includes a discussion of the yin/yang paired relationships in foods. She indicates which foods are expansive vs. contractive, acid vs. alkaline, cooling vs. warming and building vs. breaking down.
- Colbin takes all of this information and shows how it applies to modern diets. She looks at the Standard American Diet (SAD), Recommended American Diet (RAD), The

Pritikin Diet, High-Protein Diets, Fortified Foods Natural Diet, Vegetarianism, Raw Foods Diet and Macrobiotics.

Colbin eventually provides guidelines for healthy eating, with her key ingredients being flexibility, rejection of guilt and fear in making food selections, and paying attention to how the foods we eat affect us. Her general nutritional guidelines are: (p137)

- Whole grains beans, fresh vegetables and fruits in season, nuts, seeds, sea vegetables all organically grown whenever possible
- Fermented or pickled vegetables or beans (pickles, sauerkraut, tempeh, and so on)
- Fish, organic eggs, or naturally raised fowl when desired, and for some people, an occasional small amount of red meat, naturally raised if possible.
- Herbs, spices, sea salt, natural soy sauce, unpasteurized miso (fermented, salted soybean paste), and other natural condiment in moderate amounts
- Unrefined sesame oil, extra-virgin olive oil, or, for occasional frying, cold-pressed safflower oil; unpasteurized butter, tahini, sesame butter (the total daily fat intake from all sources ideally should not exceed two tablespoons, plus or minus)
- For sweeteners, fruit juices, maple syrup, rice syrup, or barley malt in very modest amounts
- Spring water for all cooking and drinking
- Popular herb teas, such as peppermint and chamomile, roasted green tea (bancha) or twig tea (kukicha), grain coffees (made from dark-roasted chickory, barley, and so on)
- Dairy products, unpasteurized if possible, as an occasional treat (if they cause no clear problem)
- Guilt-free meals out with friends or family when the occasion arises

Colbin says to avoid (if possible, most of the time):

- Sugar (white, brown, raw) and honey
- Pasteurized, homogenized, vitamin D-fortified milk; cheeses, ice cream, sour and heavy cream, yogurt
- White flour, white rice (except in ethnic restaurants on occasion)
- Canned and frozen foods
- Steak, nitrate and nitrate-cured meats and fish, commercial eggs
- Iodized salt, commercial soy sauce, highly seasoned foods
- Lard, shortening, commercial oils, fried foods, nut and peanut butters (except in small amounts on occasion)
- Fluorinated, chlorinated tap water (except in restaurants); distilled water
- Coffee, hot chocolate, “mate” herb tea, and other caffeinated or medicinal beverages, except as needed
- Grim meals that are “good for you”
- Hedonistic meals that mess up the body’s balance for longer than a day or two

Finally, Colbin offers guidelines for transitioning to a healthier diet, including a discussion of the healing reaction that happens in the body as unhealthy foods are

eliminated. The last part of the book deals with specific illnesses and conditions and how they can be best supported with diet.

**\*\*\*Additional Commentary\*\*\***

We are often struck in the treatment room by what our patients regard as a healthy diet. Interestingly enough, as patients progress through treatment and begin to pay attention to the subtle cues their bodies are giving them, they tend to gravitate naturally toward some of Colbin's recommendations. One reference that we highly recommend to patients who are serious about transforming their diet is "Healing with Whole Foods", by Paul Pritchford. Also there are three more books by Colbin, one called "The Book of Whole Meals" and another is called "The Natural Gourmet". Both of these books use the principles in "Food and Healing" to create healthy recipes based upon Colbin's holistic philosophies. The third is called "Food and our Bones" Which addresses dietary prevention of osteoporosis.

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