

INTRODUCTION ◉
AN EATER'S MANIFESTO

◉ Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.
That, more or less, is the short answer to the supposedly incredibly complicated and confusing question of what we humans should eat in order to be maximally healthy. ◉

I hate to give the game away right here at the beginning of a whole book devoted to the subject, and I'm tempted to complicate matters in the interest of keeping things going for a couple hundred more pages or so. I'll try to resist, but will go ahead and add a few more details to flesh out the recommendations. Like, eating a little meat isn't going to kill you, though it might be better approached as a side dish than as a main. And you're better off eating whole fresh foods rather than processed food products. That's what I mean by the recommendation to "eat food," which is not quite as simple as it sounds. For while it used to be that food was all you could eat, today there are thousands of other edible foodlike substances in the supermarket. These novel products of food science often

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come in packages elaborately festooned with health claims, which brings me to another, somewhat counterintuitive, piece of advice: If you're concerned about your health, you should probably avoid products that make health claims. Why? Because a health claim on a food product is a strong indication it's not really food, and food is what you want to eat.

You can see how quickly things can get complicated.

I started on this quest to identify a few simple rules about eating after publishing *The Omnivore's Dilemma* in 2006. Questions of personal health did not take center stage in that book, which was more concerned with the ecological and ethical dimensions of our eating choices. (Though I've found that, in most but not all cases, the best ethical and environmental choices also happen to be the best choices for our health—very good news indeed.) But many readers wanted to know, after they'd spent a few hundred pages following me following the food chains that feed us, "Okay, but what should I eat? And now that you've been to the feedlots, the food-processing plants, the organic factory farms, and the local farms and ranches, what do you eat?"

Fair questions, though it does seem to me a symptom of our present confusion about food that people would feel the need to consult a journalist, or for that matter a nutritionist or doctor or government food pyramid, on so basic a question about the conduct of our everyday lives as humans. I mean, what other animal needs professional help in deciding what it should eat? True, as omnivores—creatures that can eat just about anything nature has to offer and that in fact need to eat a wide variety of different things in order to be healthy—the

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