

Health

food

by Liv Unger

Introduction

Why natural food? This article attempts to give the basic information concerning natural food as opposed to processed food. It includes an introduction to the "why" of natural foods; the role of nutrition educators Carol and Danny Baker-Toombes, as operators of a natural food store; the protein theory evolved by Frances Lappe, and its practical application; simple methods for making yogurt and granola and directions for sprouting beans; and the techniques used in the processing of flour, oats, oil, sugar and honey.

If you are basically interested in natural food but somehow never quite got around to giving it a try, read this article and you will have at least the groundwork to start you on the road to a natural food diet. Natural food is not, contrary to popular belief, synonymous with food fanaticism or vegetarianism. Some people eat natural food as a supplement to their regular diet; others prefer to have natural food compose the greater part of their diet; still others may eat only natural foods with an occasional meat or fish meal. Eating preferences vary from person to person. The important thing is to be open to alternative eating habits if you are not fully satisfied with present ones.

So, relax and sit down with a curious mind and a cup of tea, a mug of beer or whatever and find out about the food you are eating. If this feature even vaguely interests you now, cut it out and save it for the day you become genuinely interested. Who knows? It might just come in handy.



Part I Natural Versus Processed

It wasn't until April of 1971 that Danny and Carol Baker-Toombes finally opened the door of the first natural food store in the Maritimes--The Bean Sprout.

Maybe you couldn't dip into that chubby barrel of creamy, delicious peanut butter today if Carol and her husband, Danny a 27 year old native of Saskatchewan hadn't decided, strictly on impulse, to head east from Toronto in 1970. The Baker-Toombes' arrived in Halifax in the spring of the year and were attending the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design for a few months when the idea of establishing a natural food store took their fancy, time and talent.

I spent two half days talking with Danny and Carol about the difficulties of establishing a natural food store and their views on natural food.

In 1970 the idea of "natural foods" was relatively new, even to Carol and Danny who at that time had tried only a few basics. It was an innocent but unsuccessful quest for wheat germ that started the idea of opening their own food store; it was a determined effort to stock it on the shelves of their own food store that guaranteed their success.

This soft-spoken, affable young man had many reservations for a health viewpoint about commercially processed foods. He said that the long-range effects of processed foods is largely unknown since they are relatively new in man's long history.

Danny went on to say that his objection to processed food is two fold: 1) bulk--the fibrous part of food is largely absent in processed foods and 2) vitamins and minerals presently in the whole food are mostly removed during processing its entry at about the same time but without the fuss.

When asked if there was a difference between a health food store and a natural food store, Danny said there was a subtle, almost emotional distinction between the two. Danny differentiates between the packaging and attitudes that go with each. Health food is pre-packaged, usually in small quantities where the emphasis is on health through nutrition. The atmosphere of such a store is often reserved and lacking in spontaneity.

A natural food store, on the other hand, implies bulk, connotes images of hardy bins full of oats, beans and barely and plump wooden barrels brimming with nuts, flour and winking black-eyed peas. Natural food means unprocessed quality foods available in generous quantities. "Natural foods," said Danny, "means buying and eating food that is not only good for you, but fun to cook."

Organic food, another familiar term, refers to food that is grown without pesticides, herbicides (weed killers) and chemical fertilizers. Because these chemicals are not used, the growing and harvesting of these crops is less profitable and therefore more expensive to the consumer. You will find organic foods labelled as such in the Bean Sprout.

Finally, there are processed foods. Although white flour and white sugar have been around for a hundred years, processing did not become popular until after World War II. Processed peanut butter made its controversial entrance in 1950 causing a great deal of debate over the legitimacy of the term "peanut butter." Final legislation in the U.S. required the product to be at least 88% peanuts with food processors adding lard, chemicals, sugar and salt to make up the difference. (In Canada, Schwartz's is one of the best peanut butters having 97% peanuts.) Over-salted, over-sweetened baby foods made its entry at about the same time but without the fuss.

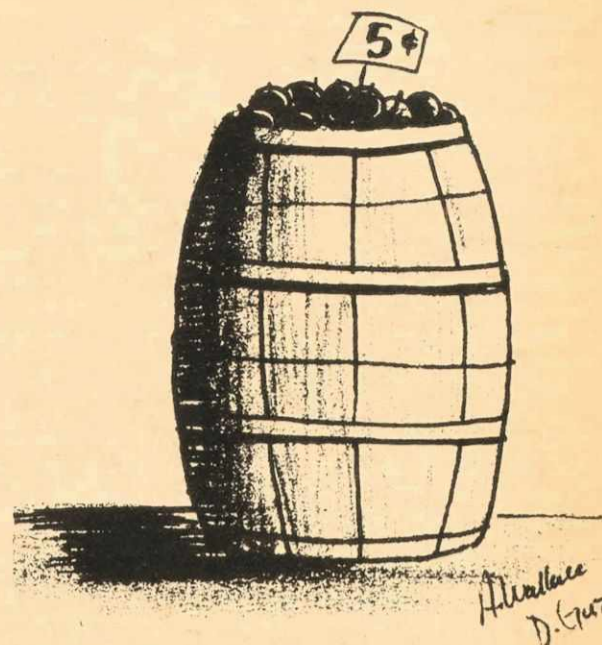
Why processed food in the firstplace? In one word-profit? Companies whose business is food could not resist using chemicals to facilitate and expediate processing, distribution and storage. For instance, in the processing of white flour one chemical is used to bleach it to a snowy-white; a second chemical matures it and a third chemical, a gassing agent, ensures a consistent high rise in bread baked from it. Hydrogenated oil in peanut butter will make the peanut butter last longer and will prevent the oil from separating in the jar. In fact, most processed food is designed to have a minimum shelf life of two years.

Not being content with merely adding chemicals many of whose long term effects are neither studied nor known, the food companies busied themselves with extracting the better part of many foods--the part that spoils easily and so shortens the storage life of the product. Adelle Davis, a well-known nutritionist and author of several health books, wrote about the rape of flour whereby manufacturers remove the wheat germ containing 57 nutrients because the germ spoils too easily. Afterwards, they replace four of these nutrients and name it "enriched" flour. Similarly, white rice is brown rice largely stripped of its nutritional value--the hull. In the manufacturing of peanut butter, the nutritional heart (germ) of the peanut is removed to prevent the peanut butter from spoiling within a few months.

The lack of bulk in processed foods is also disturbing because bulk is an essential factor in a healthy diet. After digestion takes place, residue is left behind in the intestinal tract. This residue is toxic, especially if it is the residue of meat or the chemical residue leftover from processed foods. The fibrous part of the food, which is indigestible, acts like a broom and quickly cleans out the intestinal tract. The importance of food fibre, cannot be underestimated. It rids your body of unhealthy poisons before they get a chance to do any damage.

Before 1850 the average diet provided 80% more roughage or bulk than found in the average diet of today. It is the popular consumption of processed foods which, in part of whole, accounts for the phenomenal increase in the incidence of several intestinal diseases.

The loss of most of the vitamins and minerals due to processing is no less disturbing. The final result is that people are paying a great deal of money for food high in calories and low in food value. It is understandable,

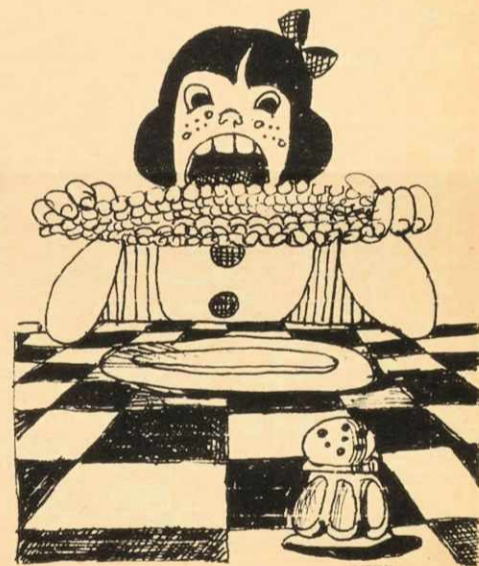


therefore, with the quality and quantity of our food consumption, patterns. Why we live in a nation in which, according to the Nutrition Canada Survey, 1973, approximately half of the adult population is either overweight or obese.

It would be worth your while to look into alternate eating practises, such as natural, organic and health foods in order to avoid the two common effects of an inadequate diet--constipation and malnourishment. Malnourishment results when a person's nutritional intake is less than recommended MDR--minimum daily requirements formulated by Nutrition Canada.

Initially it will take time and effort to develop your knowledge and understanding of nutrition but in the long run, your good health is worth the little extra effort.

If you are an interested, but ignorant novice in the field of nutrition, a good rule of thumb to follow in seeking quality food is "the less processed, the more nutritious."



Part II What to do with the food you buy

Because of time pressures, I was not able to visit the People's Food Store, 1020 Barrington Street or the Natural Foods, 56 1/2 Alderney Drive, near the ferry terminal in Dartmouth. However, I do know from past experience that the owners of all these food stores pursue the course of infinite patience in their willingness to educate the people they serve about the products they sell. They extend quality of life not only by their food, but also by a genuine interest in the customer. The House of Health, 1712 Granville, is a health food store you might also be interested in visiting.

When the Bean Sprout first opened its clientele consisted mostly of students, freaks, and country people many of whom were bulk customers. Because of this a mail order business was started which at its peak had over 800 names. Orders came in from everywhere--Cape Breton, Newfoundland and as far away as the Magdalen Islands. The orders ranged from a quaint \$6.00 order for wheat germ, sunflower seeds and raisins to a few hundred dollars order for bulk supplies of staples to carry people through the cold winter.

When the Bean Sprout moved from 1709 Barrington Street to its current location, it kept its old customers and added new ones. Over a period of time, the old customers stopped coming and they were replaced by office workers and housewives. A few possible reasons for this: 1) It was the first natural food store when it opened in 1971. Now there are 20 altogether so people can go to one that is nearer. Also, the new food store appeared more commercial. There was less bulk and more pre-packaging

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