

# what to eat

The Ten Things You Really  
Need to Know to Eat Well  
and Be Healthy!



Luisse Light, M.S., Ed.D.

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**LUISE LIGHT, M.S., ED.D.**

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*What to Eat: The Ten Things You Really Need to Know to Eat Well and Be Healthy!* is intended solely for informational and educational purposes and not as personal medical advice. Please consult your health-care professional if you have any questions about your health. Stories and personal histories related to weight, nutrition, and health in this book have been changed to protect the identity of individuals who provided them. Neither the author nor the publisher has received financial support from the food industry or groups that represent its special interests.

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*I dedicate this book with love and gratitude to the women healers and teachers whose advice and perspectives created in me a passion for the truth and a dedication to sharing what I've learned with others who are willing to consider how these words may benefit them:*

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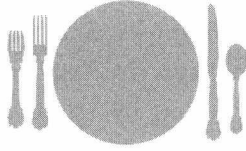
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*And in loving memory, Annie Toglia*



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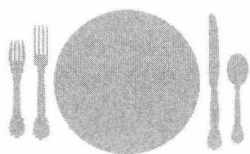
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# INTRODUCTION

**Y**ou picked up this book because you have questions about how to eat well. Eating has become confusing. One week you hear that eating too much meat increases your risk of getting colon cancer. The next week you hear just the opposite. One week milk helps you lose weight; the next week this claim is considered bogus. One news story says breast cancer has nothing to do with how much fat you eat, the next one says it does. Should we be eating low-fat or low-carb? Are the new USDA guidelines ([my pyramid.gov](http://my.pyramid.gov)) the best ones to follow, or should we just forget them and buy what's convenient?

There's so much conflicting information about nutrition and health. If you're like most Americans, you believe there are good and bad foods and that eating too much fat is bad, but you haven't a clue how to eat less. You watch your portion sizes but don't know if you are eating too many or just the right amount of calories.



Confusion has grown beyond all reasonable limits. Despite a deluge of “healthy products” and daily bombardments of health claims in the media, more people are overweight than ever before. That’s why you need this book, *What to Eat*, because it offers the answers you’re looking for.

When I left Washington in 1995, I was convinced that I had left the field of nutrition for good. I was disappointed and depressed that good nutrition and healthy eating, subjects fundamental to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” were obscured by lobbyists and their allies in government. A seemingly impenetrable wall of distortion had been erected to block new thinking that could interfere with the way food was made, promoted, or sold.

After fourteen years working as a nutritionist in two government agencies, I went to work as the director of the Institute for Science in Society (ISIS), a small non-profit think tank. The last ISIS white paper we released to the press was on infectious problems in the U.S. meat supply. The ISIS report documented the poor sanitary practices and the government’s archaic and negligent inspection procedures that were directly to blame for these outbreaks.

We were just beginning to hear about the British epidemic of mad cow disease, but we were reassured by USDA officials that the problem was localized to Britain and couldn’t happen in North America. However, my colleagues at the National Institutes of Health, who were infectious disease specialists, already knew that mad cow disease grew out of changes in how animal feeds were manufactured and that our cows were being fed the same way. They assured me that unless we started making

changes in our feeding and inspection practices, the problem could be just as deadly here.

Industry reaction to the ISIS report was furious, and then, as the press lost interest, it turned deadly quiet. I left Washington and moved to Connecticut to a job as health editor of *Vegetarian Times* magazine. I wasn't a vegetarian, but the ISIS meat report gave me enough credibility to be hired by a magazine that celebrated meatless lifestyles. I ended up as the editorial director of a small New England book publisher and training institute, as well as a freelance writer/editor. But I continued to follow news of nutrition and to read reports that described the horrific, escalating rates of obesity, diabetes, and other diet-related diseases engulfing North Americans of all ages and much of the world as well.

I kept puzzling about it, asking myself, what's going on? What was it about our food, lifestyles, and environment that was plunging us into such a devastating abyss? What could we do as individuals to avoid becoming victims of these terrible plagues? Was there a way of eating and living that would save us? Little by little, I was drawn back into the field of nutrition, determined to use my skills to investigate the problem and find solutions to offer people.

In the past twenty years, the time frame in which obesity and chronic diseases have hit us so hard, we have experienced major changes in how we eat, what we eat, and the nutritional content of our foods and diets. If there were answers to our problems, they had to come from those areas.

One profound change was globalization, and most of the changes in our foods were made to enable us to deliver similar foods and drinks to consumers in Malaysia, Mada-

gascar, Ecuador, and Nigeria as well as North America. The innovative foods we began to eat were designed for long shelf lives and a wide variety of climates. But our Paleolithic bodies don't handle innovative factory foods very well, and we are paying a high price for these quick and easy foods.

This is a book for people concerned about what to eat to stay healthy, lose weight, and to the extent possible, avoid common chronic diseases. There are so many different approaches to healthy eating that it's hard to know which approach will work best for you. *What to Eat* is not a primer to prove that any single philosophy of eating is more correct than others. What is offered is a tour through the changing landscape of our nutritional problems and clear answers to your questions about how to eat well and be healthy even as the world of food changes around us.

In addition to offering a road map for healthy eating, this guide helps expose the underbelly of our national obsession with food; reveals facts about ingredients in popular foods that could adversely affect our health and weight; provides insights into how food is marketed to make us buy it; and shows how starved we are for reliable information.

But even more fundamental than these issues is the sense of disempowerment many of us experience when dealing with food. It's as if we are strangers in an alien food landscape. Two-thirds of Americans make food decisions based on what we hear, see, and read in the media, but the media only tell us the food and nutrition stories that are endorsed by corporate sponsors. If you never look

at food through another lens, it is easy to assume those are the only facts worth knowing.

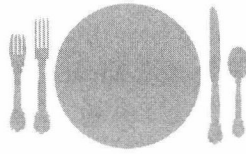
Yet most of us have an innate ability to recognize that food is more than something that quiets our internal signals of distress when we're hungry. Food is the raw material that the alchemy of our bodies transmutes into sinew, muscle, and gland and into the raw resources for the millions of chemical reactions governing how our bodies, minds, and emotions function as we grow from infancy to childhood to adolescence to maturity.

*What to Eat* is written for both men and women because diet-related health risks affect men and women equally. Biologically, we are far more similar than we are different, a conclusion supported by the striking parallels in men's and women's rates of chronic disease.

The conclusion to this particular story is this: we need to take back the reins regarding what and how to eat on a personal level, in our families, and for the environment. For too long we have allowed others, with different agendas than ours, to make these decisions for us. As you will see when you read this book, we can't afford to do that any longer. You must decide for yourself what is good and healthful for you to eat. All the experts in the world don't know as much as you do about that.

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