

Extrait de RSSL Food e-news. Edition 381: 26 March - 02 April 2008

Just eat food!

In a short review in the [British Medical Journal](#), Professor Benjamin Caballero from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, US, has some rather harsh things to say about a book by Michael Pollan entitled "[In Defense of Food](#)".

In his book, Pollan tries to address the confusing question of what human beings should eat to remain healthy. His answer is to "eat food" instead of all the thousands of other "food-like substances" which can be found in supermarkets. Pollan suggests that there is a "great Conspiracy of Scientific Complexity" which is caused by food scientists deliberately avoiding any mention of whole foods and instead focussing on individual ingredients. For instance, he claims that they say "don't eat saturated fat" instead of saying "don't eat meat" in the hope that by the time the average consumer has figured out the difference between saturated and unsaturated fat they will have finished their cheeseburger!. Whilst Caballero agrees with Pollan's initial advice to "eat food, not too much, mostly plants" he also points out that this is what most food scientists have been saying for many years and is nothing new. For instance, the US dietary guidelines put out in 1995 suggested that most of an American's calories should come from fruits, vegetables and grains. However, Caballero does take issue with Pollan's advice "not to eat anything your great-grandmother would not approve of", which he says is meaningless and points to the fact that most grandmothers had 15 years less of life than their modern counterparts. As Caballero says, **the challenge for nutrition science, just as for nuclear physics and science in general is not to bury discoveries and dream about a simpler past but to apply the new knowledge in a positive way to improve lives.** In contrast, Pollan admits that many of his suggestions come down to strategies for escaping the Western diet, which he believes have been made a little easier by the advance of farmer's markets and the rise of the organic movement.

Caballero concludes his review of Pollan's book by saying that in spite of the sometimes contradictory dietary messages which the public get from scientists and the media, advances in nutrition science have enhanced our ability to provide a better quality, stable food supply to the population.