

WHAT IS A WHOLE FOOD?

To determine whether a food is whole or not, be conscious when making food choices. Before you put a bite in your mouth, before you heat it up, before you even decide to toss it in the grocery cart, take a moment to consider where the food came from. What was its life like before it presented itself to you for consumption. Foods that are in boxes can be mysterious. The life-journey of whole foods are easier to imagine. To determine whether a food is whole or not, consider these questions:

CAN I IMAGINE IT GROWING?

It is easy to picture a wheat field or an apple on a tree. It's tough to picture a field of marshmallows. There are no streams where one can scoop out a bucket of soda, and no trees where you can pick Cheerios.

HOW MANY INGREDIENTS DOES IT HAVE?

A whole food has only one ingredient—itsself. No label of ingredients is necessary on simple foods like avocados, salmon, wild rice.

WHAT'S BEEN DONE TO THE FOOD SINCE IT'S BEEN HARVESTED?

The less, the better. Many foods we eat no longer resemble anything found in nature. Stripped, refined, bleached, injected, hydrogenated, chemically treated, irradiated, and gassed, modern foods have literally had the life taken out of them. Read the list of ingredients on the label: if you can't pronounce something or can't imagine it growing, don't eat it. If it's not something that you could possibly make in your kitchen or grow in your garden, be wary. For example, you can make miso (with some effort!) from soybeans, but you can't make isolated soy protein.

IS THIS PRODUCT "PART" OF A FOOD OR THE "WHOLE" ENTITY?

Juice is only a part of a fruit. Oil is only a part of the olive. Low-fat milk is only a part of the milk. When you eat a lot of partial foods, your body in its natural wisdom will crave the parts it didn't get.

HOW LONG HAS THIS FOOD BEEN KNOWN TO NOURISH HUMAN BEINGS?

Sounds rough, but what about a criterion of a thousand years, or at least a couple of hundred. . .? Putting something on my toast or in my tea that the FDA approved last month warrants caution. Time and again, the rush to put a new drug, supplement, or food additive on the market has had questionable long-term effects. Most whole foods have been on the dinner table for centuries.

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Adapted by Andrea Nakayama from Feeding the Whole Family by Cynthia Lair