



Pandora's Lunchbox: How Processed Food Took Over the American Meal

By Melanie Warner

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In the tradition of *Fast Food Nation* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* a fascinating and cutting-edge look at the scary truth about what really goes into our food.

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If a piece of individually wrapped cheese can retain its shape, color, and texture for years, what does it say about the food we eat and feed to our children?

Former New York Times business reporter and mother Melanie Warner decided to explore that question when she observed the phenomenon of the indestructible cheese. She began an investigative journey that took her to research labs, university food science departments, and factories around the country. What she discovered provides a rare, eye-opening—and sometimes disturbing—account of what we're really eating. Warner looks at how decades of food science have resulted in the cheapest, most abundant, most addictive, and most nutritionally inferior food in the world, and she uncovers startling evidence about the profound health implications of the packaged and fast foods that we eat on a daily basis.

From breakfast cereal to chicken subs to nutrition bars, processed foods account for roughly 70 percent of our nation's calories. Despite the growing presence of farmers' markets and organic produce, strange food additives are nearly impossible to avoid. Warner digs deep into the ingredient lists of purportedly healthy foods, and what she finds will change the way readers eat—and how they feed their children.

Combining meticulous research, vivid writing, and cultural analysis, Warner blows the lid off the largely undocumented—and lightly regulated—world of chemically treated and processed foods and lays bare the potential price we may pay for consuming even so-called healthy foods.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Q&A with Melanie Warner



Q. What inspired you to want to explore the subject of processed foods?

A. The idea for a book crystallized for me not long after I began writing about the food and beverage industries in the mid-2000s. I went to a trade show called IFT (Institute of Food Technologists), one of the food industry's largest gatherings. Inside a massive convention center, there were people selling things like micro-particulated whey protein, inner pea fiber and starches that had been modified to mimic fat or dietary fiber. Companies talked about food as an "application," as if it was a piece of software you put together. It seemed to me that our food had become vastly more technical and complicated than we realized, and we had little idea about what happens to it after it leaves the farm. This was the story I wanted to tell. Because in order to make good food choices, we first need to know what we're eating.

Q. What should everyone know about processed foods?

A. Processed food represents an entirely new way of eating for us as human beings. Our diets have changed more in the last 100 years than they have in the last 10,000. So much of what we see in the middle aisles at grocery stores and on fast food menu boards simply didn't exist a century ago.

This is a concern because, while the technology for processing food has advanced by leaps and bounds, our human biology hasn't. The way our bodies handle food is stuck somewhere in the Stone Age, long before there was sugary boxed cereal, chicken nuggets and frozen dinners. Much of what we eat is now deeply out of synch with our biology.

Q. What surprised you the most in your research?

A. Where vitamins come from (many of them come from China and are derived from starting ingredients like sheep grease) and how prevalent soybean oil is in our diets (10% of total calories) and the health implications of that.

Q. How has your behavior changed since writing the book? Do you eat differently? Do you feed your

children differently?

A. Although I generally follow my own advice – a diet with fresh, real foods at its foundation – I do eat processed foods, as do my kids. But the book has made me a little more careful of my choices. When you stare at ingredient lists long enough, the siren call of quick, convenient, indulgent food often goes on mute. I have to say that I am no longer tempted by donuts! I also stopped my occasional purchase of fast food French fries because of what I uncovered about the toxic compounds formed in heated frying oil. And I realized there were certain things I was buying prepackaged that could in fact be made relatively easily at home, like homemade mac and cheese for the kids, made with real cheese instead of the powdered stuff in the box.

Review

"Indispensable." (*Newsday*)

"So much fun that you might forget how depressing it all is... There are more Holy Cow! moments here than even someone who thinks he or she knows what's going on in food production could predict." (Mark Bittman *The New York Times*)

"In Pandora's Lunchbox, Melanie Warner has produced an engaging account of how today's 'food processing industrial complex' replaced real foods with the inventions of food science. Her history of how this happened and who benefits from these inventions should be enough to inspire everyone to get back into the kitchen and start cooking." (Marion Nestle, Professor of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health at New York University and coauthor of *Why Calories Count: From Science to Politics*)

"Pandora's Lunchbox is a brilliant and fascinating exploration of how our food gets processed, its powerful effects on our health, and what we can do about it. Highly recommended!" (Dean Ornish M.D., author of *Eat More, Weigh Less, and The Spectrum: A Scientifically Proven Program to Feel Better, Live Longer, Lose Weight, and Gain Health*)

"Melanie Warner is a journalist of keen skill, and in Pandora's Lunchbox she pries the lid off well-packaged secrets about how our so-called food is made. The resulting bounty of insights and revelations is almost overwhelming. This is a book of stunning, at times shocking truths, told in a crisp, compelling narrative. Of profound importance for everyone who eats." (David L. Katz, MD, MPH, FACPM, FACP, Director of Yale University Prevention Research Center and Director of Integrative Medicine Center at Griffin Hospital)

"Warner pulls back the curtain to reveal the industry secrets of how our most basic staples are being transformed into processed foodstuffs to boost profits. We get an (un)healthy dose of hexane-extraction, gun puffing and roast chicken type flavor, but like the best investigative journalists, she uses the personal stories of food scientists, innovators, and crusaders not to mention her own home experiments, to show why you'll want to think twice before hitting the drive-thru or reaching for that 'health bar.'" (Robert Kenner, director of Food, Inc.)

"In the tradition of *Fast Food Nation* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* is a fascinating and cutting-edge look at the scary truth about what really goes into our food." (*Publishers Weekly*)

"A gripping exposé." (*Wall Street Journal*)

"Fascinating." (*The A.V. Club*)

About the Author

Melanie Warner is a freelance writer for various publications, including *The New York Times*, *Fast Company*, and CBSnews.com. She has spent the past fifteen years writing about business. For two years, she was a staff reporter for *The New York Times* covering the food industry. Before that, she spent seven years as a writer at *Fortune* magazine, where among other things, she wrote about the dot com boom in Silicon Valley. She lives in Colorado with her husband and two young boys.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Richard Martinez:

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Gabriel Cleveland:

As people who live in typically the modest era should be up-date about what going on or info even knowledge to make all of them keep up with the era and that is always change and advance. Some of you maybe may update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to a person is you don't know which you should start with. This Pandora's Lunchbox: How Processed Food Took Over the American Meal is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because book serves what you want and want in this era.

Aaron Marks:

Spent a free a chance to be fun activity to perform! A lot of people spent their spare time with their family, or their particular friends. Usually they performing activity like watching television, gonna beach, or picnic inside park. They actually doing same thing every week. Do you feel it? Will you something different to fill your free time/ holiday? Can be reading a book is usually option to fill your no cost time/ holiday. The first thing that you'll ask may be what kinds of e-book that you should read. If you want to try out look for book, may be the e-book untitled Pandora's Lunchbox: How Processed Food Took Over the American Meal can be great book to read. May be it can be best activity to you.

Susan Tarin:

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