Two cavities in my four-year-old son’s mouth helped introduce me to healthier ways of eating. Uncertainty about whether or not my son could sit still long enough to have his teeth filled under local anesthetic and concerns about what fillings contain led me to look into alternatives for his teeth. I began by joining an alternative dental Yahoo group. Very quickly, I learned that similar values lead to similar ways of living. On this forum, I ran into an unschooling mum I was already acquainted with who lives just a few minutes away and whose daughter had a number of cavities. Picking up my raw milk for the first time two weeks later, I ran into another unschooling mum I was already acquainted with whose son had cavities as well.

Through these connections, I was introduced to the works of Weston A. Price. Following one lead after another, I introduced to the works of Weston A. Price. Following one lead after another, I introduced to the works of Weston A. Price. Following one lead after another, I introduced to the works of Weston A. Price. After reading her book, I realized I barely know anything about food! I wanted to know more and why and when and how and what, so I started reading even more. Here’s some of what I’ve learned.

**Grains, Seeds, Nuts and Fats**

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Through these connections, I was introduced to the works of Weston A. Price. Following one lead after another, I picked up and read *Nourishing Traditions* by Sally Fallon, co-founder of the Weston A. Price Foundation. After reading her book, I realized I barely know anything about food! I wanted to know more and why and when and how and what, so I started reading even more. Here’s some of what I’ve learned.

**Seeds, Nuts, Grains**

Grocery stores, nutritionists, doctors and the larger culture tell us that white flour, white rice and other refined carbohydrates are not good for us and that whole wheat products, as well as seeds and nuts, are healthy. However, this does not tell us the whole story. Not only does this statement not account for the fact that within three days all the nutrients are gone from whole wheat flour, but grains, seeds and nuts that are not soaked, sprouted or fermented can be harmful to our bodies.

Grains, seeds and nuts contain phytic acid, a substance that prevents our bodies from being able to absorb calcium, magnesium, iron, copper and zinc. Soaking, sprouting or fermenting them neutralizes the phytic acid (there are a few exceptions to this rule such as flax seeds, soybeans and alfalfa). Sprouting also increases vitamin B, vitamin C and carotene. Small amounts of unsoaked seeds, grains and nuts can be tolerated, but not in the levels that most of us consume them. (This can, in part, explain our growing epidemic of food allergies.)

When I first read about seeds, grains and nuts needing to be soaked, I was overwhelmed, angered and frustrated. My family eats a lot of these in the form of rice (unsoaked), granola (unsoaked oats) and bread products (unsoaked grains), often topped with unsoaked nut butters! I thought I was feeding my family well by giving them these products in organic form. Nope. Why is this basic and important piece of information so little known? Cultures all over the world followed soaking, sprouting and fermenting methods for centuries. Why did we discard them?

Michael Pollan in *In Defense of Food* goes into the history of food and why we threw out our traditions for the hypotheses of nutritionists, corporations and scientists. Pollan’s book helped me feel better about how little I know when it comes to food and how much time it is taking to learn.

After adjusting to this news and realizing that I could not let this information go, we searched for and found a local source of organic sprouted grain bread products, such as tortillas, bread and burger buns, and decided to buy a grain mill. This way we could definitely make our own pancakes, loaves and desserts, and if and when we were ready, we could make our own bread. We started making our own bread over a year ago and a few months later started making our own crackers as well, which was a nice treat because we’d been off them for so long.

Side note: A huge bonus, from my perspective as a parent, to eating locally and grinding our own grain is that my kids think having a banana or eating crackers is a treat. Tropical fruit is so rare in our house that my three kids are beside themselves with excitement when they are given a banana or an orange. Crackers are the same because they take time to make and are therefore not a priority.

Soaking, sprouting and fermenting seeds, grains and nuts have led to our biggest lifestyle change and adjustment in thinking. I always have to be preparing and thinking ahead because anything that involves seeds, grains or nuts has to be prepared in advance. We usually have a series of seeds, nuts or grains being soaked, sprouted or dried at any given time. Breakfast was the meal that was initially hardest for me to adjust to and remember. If I forget to start dinner preparation the night before, I always have a second chance in the morning. No such luck with breakfast! Oats need to be soaked the night before they’re used, flour needs to be ground and soaked the night before making pancakes and bread dough needs to be taken out of the freezer to defrost and rise before baking. Beans also need to soak overnight. If I forget to soak them, we’re not eating them! On days that I do forget to get breakfast organized the night before, I often wind up eating eggs often step in as a perfect quick food. However, we’ve also gotten used to eating leftover dinner for breakfast on mornings I’ve forgotten!

**Fats**

Although this is slowly changing, many health professionals, against recent research, still tell us that foods low in fat and cholesterol are healthy. Not only are...
they healthy, we are told, but they are much healthier than their full fat counterparts because high fat diets are the cause of obesity, heart disease and cancer.

I haven’t personally been to too many doctors in my life, but my mother-in-law has. She has poor heart health. She’s had a number of cardiac arrests, heart valve replacement surgery and cancer, and she lives with diabetes. All her doctors still tell her to eat a low fat diet. Listening to and trusting her doctors, she made the switch from full fat to low fat and now has a fridge full of skim milk, margarine and low fat processed cheese slices that are wrapped in plastic. Every once in a blue moon, she’ll come home with a slice of brie, but her guilt for doing so is overwhelming.

In contrast to what we’ve been told, commercially made low fat foods are not good for us. They are highly processed and contain additives and a host of other ingredients that are necessary to their manufacture but not good for our bodies. Fats slow down nutrient absorption so we can go longer without feeling hungry; they act as carriers for Vitamins A, D, E and K; they are needed for carotene to be converted to Vitamin A, for mineral absorption and for many other bodily processes. Cholesterol is an antioxidant, plays an important role in the strength of the intestinal wall and is necessary for the serotonin receptors in the brain. Looking at history and scrutinizing the research that was done to prove a diet high in cholesterol and saturated fat causes heart disease and death shows us that what we have been told is wrong. Our bodies need fat.

These same professionals also tell us that canola and olive oils are healthy options and that we should be avoiding tropical oils such as palm and coconut. After one of her doctor appointments, my mother-in-law put up on the fridge a chart she’d received at the appointment, ranking oils, telling us what we should be cooking and eating with. Canola and olive oil were at the top; at the bottom, the “no no” oils were coconut and palm oil. From what I’ve read, olive oil is fine and healthy to eat in moderation, but canola is on my “Toxic, Causes Cancer” list. Canola oil is made from the rape seed, which, due to high erucic acid content, is not okay for human consumption. Even though canola oil is made to contain as little of this acid as possible, some studies show that even in small amounts, the erucic acid in canola oil can cause heart lesions. Canola oil also creates a vitamin E deficiency, is high in sulphur and becomes oxidized and rancid when heated. All the canola oil I’ve ever seen (even organic) is refined, which means it has been heated, which means it is oxidized and rancid (it doesn’t taste rancid because that taste has been removed with bleach). Chances are, the canola oil you buy is rancid and full of free radicals. In contrast, my research has shown that the tropical oils are actually a good option.

People have spent books and more books discussing these topics. My intention in presenting this small amount of information is to give you a snapshot of the contradictory information I’ve read about so that if you’re interested, you can look into it further and make up your own mind. While reading over this article, my dad asked me, “At what point and at what level does eating this way become important? Will cooking with canola oil once a year harm me? Twice a year? Once a month?” My answer is: I don’t know. I don’t know if anyone can answer that. I think it’s up to your personal comfort level. As a parent, I personally cannot knowingly put unhealthy, toxic substances into my children. That is my priority. For others, different things may be a priority. I don’t feel it’s my place to tell anyone what they should be doing, but I do feel it’s my place to share the information I’ve learned. I wish someone had shared it with me sooner!

Learn More

In Defense of Food by Michael Pollan (Penguin, 2009)
Wild Fermentation by Sandor Ellix Katz (Chelsea Green, 2003)

Deb Purcell is an unschooling mother of three children, from Vancouver, British Columbia. When she is not spending time with her family, you can find her advocating for rare disease care (visit the website www.treypurcell.com for more info), healthy living, the environment and non-compulsory schooling. She invites reader questions about her path to a healthier, greener lifestyle for her family. Email her at dcehak@telus.net. Her future articles will cover decisions about milk and meat, personal care products, plastics and other green issues. - NL -
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