



Audio essayist: Levana Kirschenbaum

Title: Why eat food that makes you sick?

Duration: 6 minutes, 29 seconds

About this transcript

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Introduction

It's said that ours is the first generation in which poor people are fat.

In this episode of Bookpod, Levana Kirschenbaum talks about *In Short Order*, her cookbook that offers an alternative way of eating to the sugar-, salt- and fat-rich foods of all too many North American diets.

Presentation

This book/DVD set of thirty very quick dishes is actually an all-day seminar that I gave to professionals that hired me because they kept saying, "We come home so late and we



don't have time to fuss around and everything, but we still want to make sure we get a good meal.”

The very first thing is, identify the recipe that gets a lot of mileage. If a recipe that serves four people has a cup of cream, two cups of wine, two sticks of butter – we didn't even start putting in any ingredients. This is to me what goes into the preparation of a dish that will serve sixteen people. Ignore that recipe!

The other extreme is almost as pernicious. If I tell you, “Oh, you're trying to lose weight, so make your soup without any oil – “ Baby food! Nobody wants it. Of course you need a little oil. You need an emollient of some sort. Otherwise, it's something you will not want to go back to. Always have that little thing that you're trying to avoid. Always!

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I've lived here almost two generations and I love it here. There's no other place I would rather be. I have one great cultural block, however. Whereas in my culture, which is Morocco, a Mediterranean country, we are proud to say, “I



made it," Americans are very proud to say, "I didn't even make it." I don't understand it.

It is your duty to look for foods as fresh as can be. But even in the absence of organic foods – unprocessed. Just unprocessed. Meaning from scratch. Don't buy frozen fish sticks. Buy a fresh fish filet that you will sauté a minute on each side. It will take less time than microwaving the fish sticks.

I think that the food industry resolutely steers the public away from this. Why make it? We can make it for you. Whereas in my culture it was, "Why do you want to buy it? You can make it."

The public thinks that because it was bought, it's a trade secret that you don't have access to. When you read the ingredients, the only thing that you don't have access to, that you should be delighted not to have access to, is this mile of ingredients that preserves the mixture.

But let's just see what it saves you. You take the mix. You preheat the oven anyway. You take a bowl and mix everything. You add an egg. You add a liquid. That's



exactly what I do to make cake from scratch. What did they save me? Five seconds? They mixed flour with salt or baking powder.

It's the scorn that we were taught about how menial and how meaningless the gestures that we make in a kitchen are that are the culprit.

Food is your friend! We have to deal with it every day all day long. All day long we deal with foods.

Forget about the "s" word, the snack word. Just eat real food. When we were hungry in my house, we baked a sweet potato. We melted a little piece of chocolate on the top of a pot going. Just the warmth of that and we put it on a piece of toast. That was a snack. It took less time than opening a bag of fried onion rings. I could faint when I see people eating that. I don't understand it.

If we could only incorporate "snack" into real food! A handful of almonds, a little ounce of chocolate. That becomes part of your meal. In other words, if that is 200 calories, that is 200 calories and it's all good food. So we are doing okay. Yogurt. Humus on a whole grain cracker.



I would always say a real heavy-duty meal – once a day because the rest of the day is really adding up.

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I saw something in a food magazine where some of the food industries, they are figuring out ways if you're driving a car or something, how you can have that cup of coffee right there. Temperature controlled, everything, without getting up, without stopping, without even reaching out for it. I think it might even jump at you and come to you. This thing Michael Pollan calls "one continuous meal." It's very American.

Why is it that we are eating one continuous meal? Because we didn't hit on the perfect bite. It's like that song, "I can't get no satisfaction. 'Cause I try and I try and I try." When you eat something good, I promise you, you have such respect for it. You'll stop.

Commercial stuff is very addictive. It is made with addictive substances. Homemade food, provided it doesn't mimic the commercial, home food is self-controlled. It is made with things that control themselves: Less sugar. Less



oil. Less fat. Less salt. Less – But commercial is made with something that begets the hunger. Begets the craving, more and more craving. This way you can't stop.

Look, even if you have no imagination whatsoever, if you put nothing wrong, just by putting nothing wrong, you will be okay. Even if the ingredients read boring, boring, boring, if it's good, good, good, it will be good.

Valedictory

For more information about Levana Kirschenbaum's cookbooks and food philosophy, visit www.levanacooks.com.

Bookpod producer is Barbara Finkelstein. Music is by Kevin MacLeod.

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