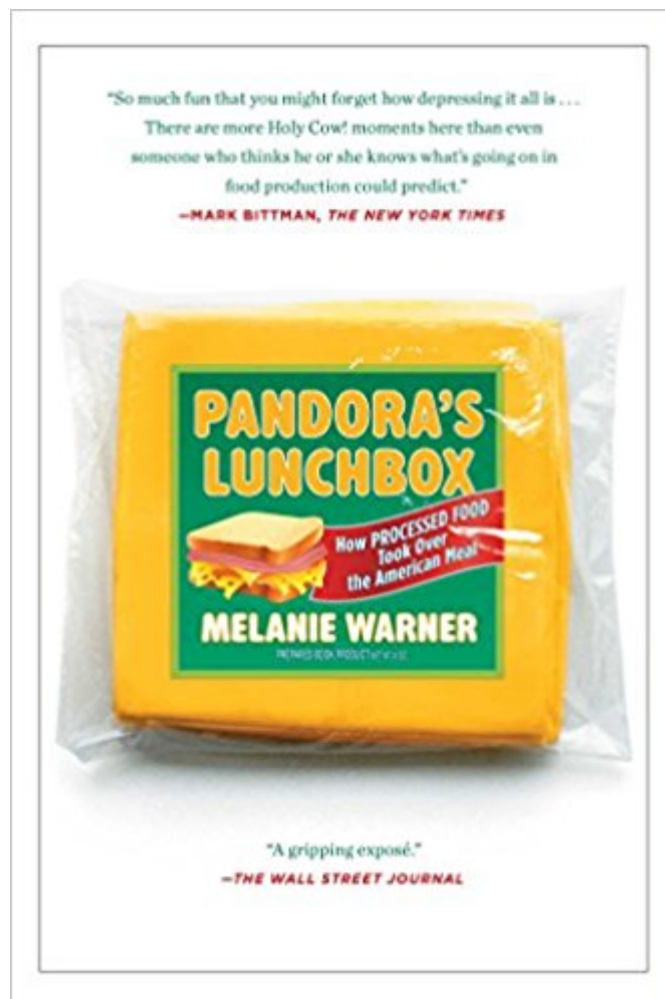




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Pandora's Lunchbox: How Processed Food Took Over The American Meal



Synopsis

In the tradition of *Fast Food Nation* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma* comes an indispensable (New York *Newsday*) fascinating, and cutting-edge look at the scary truth about what really goes into our food. 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 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. 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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Customer Reviews

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 to eat 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. --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

"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)

I heard the author on the Diane Rehm show--and decided to purchase the Kindle version of the book. At the same time, I also purchased *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us* as he was on the show too. As I got my Kindle book immediately, I began with it first. I'm so glad I did. First off, the book is just really well written. The author is an excellent writer--and her book is crafted quite well. It draws you in immediately. The whole history of chemicals, additives, food science, and food safety is completely fascinating. I knew none of it. I also had no idea just how much artificial chemically engineered crap goes into our food--nor that the US allows so many additives which Europeans and other countries find harmful. Why??? I realize that we have a laissez-faire attitude to much--but we're talking about our and our children's health. You would think that based on that, we'd be a little bit more concerned with what went into our food and its safety vs.

big business and profit. Like so many things in America, profit trumps all. I've learned so much. I had no idea how cereal was produced... veggie burgers... artificial colors/flavors, etc. I had no idea just how prevalent all of the chemical preservatives, enzymes, and additives are in our foods--pretty much everywhere, and not always labeled so that you'd know that. I'm about 3/4s of the way through. It's Sunday night, and I started reading this on Friday night. Today I went to the grocery store--and I was quite wary of purchasing my usual standard food--especially the cereal and other stuff. I'm sure I'll still buy Cheerios and some other processed foods--but probably less, and with my eyes a bit more open. Was going to purchase some cookies, and decided that we'd bake them instead. I feel that we as a country need to at least work to get the food additives banned in other countries, banned here. Major food companies have alternative versions of their products already created for these non-US markets, we should at least pressure them to offer those versions here. Oh, if you go to the author's website (or search on Youtube) you can see her videos of eternal food...including the liquified chicken tenders. Eyes opened. Thank you Melanie!

Coming on the heels of the excellent *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us* by Michael Moss, Pandora's Lunchbox might have seemed an also-ran. But there is surprisingly little overlap and the style author Melanie Warner brings is entirely different than the scrappy journalism of *Salt Sugar Fat*. You already know the story -- there is too much salt, sugar, fat in most of the prepared food items in the supermarkets and in restaurants. They are overprocessed and overpackaged. They have little nutrition and a host of ingredients we don't need or don't need in the vast quantities provided. And don't look to the government to inspect the products or determine what's dangerous -- the government has more of an interest in promoting agri-business as it does protecting us from abuses. It's nothing new, it's been this way for over a century. What could have been a depressing and distressing account, in Warner's hands, turns out to be quite an entertaining story with a lot of new information. For instance, her interview with a specialist in creating aromas and tastes for foods was original and informative. Warner's conversational style makes a horrifying story downright fun to read. There is a subtle theme running through the book along with the more obvious and alarming trends. Every executive and scientist Warner interviewed admitted that they do not eat the products they sell. For them, it's home cooked food from fresh ingredients or restaurants that specialize in organic food. No Lunchables for their kids. (Thanks to NetGalley for an advance copy.)

Really thorough, in-depth look at how our food became "food like substances." She really gets right

into the meat of the matter by showing consumers the stuff that food manufacturers don't want to tell anyone. She talks about how soybeans get turned into oil and other stuff, how corn is fermented into various substances added to foods, how chemical-made enzymes sneak into even organic foods, and how empty the rules really are regarding food additives and safety. Terms like "minimally-processed" and "natural" are completely void of meaning. Parents and children's caretakers have no clue in the world what they're actually stuffing into the children in their care. Even the most well-meaning person makes serious mistakes when choosing food to eat or serve--partly because ingredient lists are created to be as confusing and misleading as possible, but also partly because consumers don't tend to know anything about how food is produced even in a best-case scenario. She does fall a little into "CHEMICALS! BOO! HISS!" thinking, such as was debunked so grandly by SciBabe last year when FoodBabe was at her most popular. Her exact examples are the same ones that Vani Hari campaigned with in many cases. But overall, one can't deny that her conclusions are sound: that greater processing results in lower nutrition, that we're better off eating less-processed food than more-processed food, and that adding vitamins and other function to food doesn't result in the nutrition that manufacturers really want us to believe it provides. Other conclusions seem inescapable as well: that we really have no idea what some of this processing does in the body, that we're not actually sure at all what some of these chemicals even do either singly or in concert with any others, and that the more stuff is processed the worse these effects will become. At the same time, she discusses her own real efforts to feed her family while bearing in mind the facts she's uncovering. The best thing one can take away from this book is that we, as consumers, need to be paying attention to what we buy for ourselves and our families, and that we need to be aware of the trade-offs we make when we sacrifice food quality to lower its expense or save time.

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