

MIND & BODY

KAROLINA GRABOWSKA/PEXELS

NEW AFRICA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Eating whole foods is one of the key ways to avoid today's most prolific killers.



Real food is the real cure for the rise of chronic disease.

TRUE NUTRITION

Food as Medicine

THE ANSWER TO MOUNTING HEALTH CRISES

Our toxic diet is feeding diseases that can't be cured with drugs that never resolve the underlying problem

JOSEPH MERCOLA

Dr. Robert Lustig, a pediatric endocrinologist and professor emeritus at the University of California–San Francisco, has written a number of excellent books about health. His latest, “Metabolics: The Lure and the Lies of Processed Food, Nutrition, and Modern Medicine,” goes deep into the details of how changes in our food supply have damaged our metabolic health.

The title of his book, “Metabolics,” is actually a portmanteau of the words “metabolic” and “diabolical,” which captures nicely the essence of his message.

“I wrote it because nothing else has worked,” Lustig said. “Part of the problem is, this is such a complicated issue.”

Lustig says with so many stakeholders, it is critical they all have the same set of facts so they can start working together to solve the problem. Those stakeholders include patients, doctors, food companies, the insurance industry, Wall Street, and Congress.

“My job was to put all of this in one volume so that everyone had access to the same information, and then we can go from there,” he said. “I lay out in the book



Health insurance companies have a vested interest in fixing the food problem.

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Subsidies for corn and sugar provide a perverse incentive to make toxic products.

what the argument for fixing the entire food system is, and how everyone can benefit from it, even the food industry.”

The 2 Primary Keys

In summary, it boils down to two primary issues or key problems. The first is that the medical establishment doesn't want you to know that drugs were never intended or designed to treat the foundational cause of chronic disease.

“Modern medicine has two factions, two paradigms,” Lustig said. “One is treatment of acute disease, and for the most part, they've gotten it reasonably right.

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Regular conflict can often be healthy, but not when it becomes “high conflict.”

How to Turn a Toxic Conflict Into a Good One

A new book explains why we get stuck in intractable conflicts and how to get out of them

JASON MARSH

We've all been there: Locked in a heated argument, blood pressure rising, fixated on our next point rather than actually listening to what the other person has to say. Even after it ends, it doesn't really end—we keep ruminating on it for hours, days, weeks.

This is what journalist Amanda Ripley refers to as “high conflict”—and these days, we can slip into it when we're simply scanning our social media feed or glancing at the news. It often feels like our entire country is stuck there.

That's why Ripley wrote her new book, “High Conflict: Why We Get Trapped and How We Get Out.”

“High Conflict” speaks to the intense social and political polarization that is gripping our nation, yet it also offers timeless lessons for navigating conflict, whether it's interpersonal, professional, or political.

I spoke with Ripley at an event last week that the Greater Good Science Center co-hosted with Berkeley Arts & Letters. Here is an edited version of our conversation.

Jason Marsh: What led you to write a book that's a warning about certain kinds of conflict?

Amanda Ripley: I started out on this quest to find examples of people who had been stuck in really ugly conflict and gotten out, just to find some hope. What were the patterns? I realized pretty quickly that I was asking the wrong question, because it's not about getting out of conflict, because conflict can be good and healthy. It's getting out of high conflict.

High conflict can start small, but it becomes an us-versus-them kind of feud. It becomes all-consuming and takes on a life of its own. Everything you do to get out of high conflict often makes it worse. A sure sign of high conflict is that it doesn't operate according to the normal rules of engagement, and it doesn't go anywhere. There is a feeling of being stuck in high conflict, being frozen, and you just have the same fights over and over.

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TRUE NUTRITION

Food as Medicine: The Answer to Mounting Health Crises

Our toxic diet is feeding diseases that can't be cured with drugs that never resolve the underlying problem

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I was part of that system for 40 years and was comfortable within it.

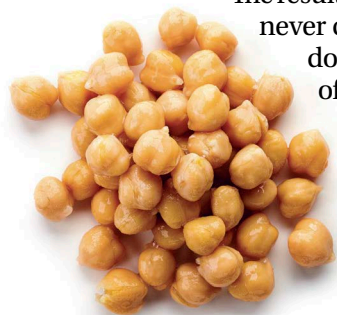
"But for chronic disease, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, lipid problems, cardiovascular disease, cancer, dementia, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease, polycystic ovarian disease—all of which are chronic metabolic diseases, all of which are mitochondrial diseases—we don't have anything. We have symptomatic relief only."

He gives LDL lowering agents as an example. LDL (low-density lipoproteins) is sometimes referred to as the "bad cholesterol." But drugs that help lower LDL levels don't treat the metabolic dysfunction that caused them to rise in the first place. He says the same is true with hyperglycemia, hypertension, osteoporosis, and autoimmune disease.

"All of these, we have symptomatic treatments. We don't cure or reverse the disease; we just treat the symptoms. And so the disease gets worse," he said.

"It's like giving an aspirin to a patient with a brain tumor because they have a headache."

The result is treatments that never cure the illness but do cost the patient a lot of money.



The other problem is that the food industry doesn't want you to know that virtually all foods are intrinsically good for you until they're processed—and processed foods make up a majority of the foods people eat. "Just because they call it processed food, doesn't make it food," Lustig said.

"Calling it a processed food suggests that it is a subset of food. Michael Pollan [calls it] palatable food-like substances. The fact of the matter is, processed food is poison. Food is medicine, but processed food is poison, and there's no medicine that can undo the damage of processed food."

It is a fairly straightforward problem once you understand that the human body is a biochemical entity that relies on an amazing variety of chain reactions to turn the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the sunshine that lands on our skin into different molecules, enzymes, proteins and so on. And that's why people don't get well without feeding their biochemistry.

The History of Medicine

In his book, Lustig does an excellent job of presenting the history of our food and medical systems, and the various pressures

that led us down the path to where we are today. For example, a significant part of why medical doctors are so clueless about health today is because Big Pharma was placed in charge of their education. The drug industry, in turn, was a distinct profit-making scheme from its inception.

In 1910, Abraham Flexner, an educator, wrote the Flexner Report, which turned out to be a turning point in terms of creating evidence-based modern medicine, while simultaneously ignoring and eliminating many health-related factors, including nutrition and preventive medicine. His brother, Simon Flexner, a pathologist and pharmacist, was the first president of Rockefeller University.

One of the reasons the Flexner Report eliminated certain aspects of medicine was because John D. Rockefeller, president of Standard Oil, was also in the pharmaceutical business. He was trying to sell coal tar, a byproduct of oil refining, as a treatment for a range of ailments.

So, Rockefeller was seeking new profit avenues. "He basically said we have to get drugs and especially coal tar into the hands of physicians who can prescribe it," Lustig said. The only way to do that was by overhauling the medical system and shifting the focus to pharmaceuticals.

"So that was the start of Big Pharma. That's not the story they want to tell, but that is in fact the case.

"Same thing with dentistry. Weston Price, perhaps the most famous of all dentists, knew this back in the 1920s and '30s and actually said that sugar was the primary driver of chronic oral disease, whether it be periodontitis or dental caries.

"Everything was going in that direction until 1945 with the advent of fluoride, and then promptly everything Weston Price had developed up to that point got deep-sixed. In fact, the dentists even said that if we got rid of dental caries, how are we going to make money? So his work was basically forgotten."

Why You Shouldn't Focus on Food Labels

By now, you've probably trained yourself diligently to read food labels. The problem is that the label won't tell you what's been done to the food.

"This is one of the reasons why nobody's getting better because there's nothing to learn from the label that will actually help you," Lustig said.

According to Lustig, a food is healthy if it satisfies two criteria: (1) It protects your liver; and (2) it feeds your gut. A food that



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does neither is poison, and any food that does only one or the other, but not both, is somewhere in the middle. Real food, because it has fiber, protects your liver and nourishes your gut. Processed food is often fiberless because fiber decreases shelf life. By removing the fiber from the food, it prevents it from going rancid, but it also makes it inherently unhealthy.

"In an attempt to try to increase availability, decrease wastage, we turned our entire food supply on its head in order to create commodities rather than make food available," Lustig said.

Then, in the 1970s, Richard Nixon told the U.S. agriculture secretary, Earl Butts, to come up with a plan to decrease food prices, as fluctuating food prices were causing political unrest. The result was the start of monoculture and chemical-driven farming.

"Now, we have nitrogen runoff destroying our environment and antibiotics in the feed in order to keep the animals alive, but basically killing off their own bacteria and ours, and also creating chronic disease and destroying the environment as well," Lustig said.

"It's basically built into our Western food system. And we're not going to solve health care, we're not going to solve chronic disease, we're not going to solve the economics [or] the environmental problems until we recognize what the problem is."

Refinement Ruins Food

While Lustig argues that the refinement of carbohydrates is the primary culprit that makes processed food so bad for your health, I believe processed fats may be an even bigger contributor.

Omega-6 linoleic acid (LA), in particular, is a pernicious metabolic poison. If eaten in equal measure with omega-3 fatty acids, it is OK, but that is not what is happening. In 1850, the LA in the average diet was about 2 percent of total calories. Today, it's between 20 percent and 30 percent. While we do need some omega-6, since the body doesn't make it, we need nowhere near the amount we're now getting, and that has chain reactions throughout your body.

Lustig warns that omega-6s are proinflammatory and have enough unsaturated double bonds that if you heat them high enough, you turn them into trans fats.

"That's the problem of all of these polyunsaturated fats. They're not meant to be heated beyond their smoking point, and we do," he said.

Polyunsaturated fats are also highly susceptible to oxidation, and as the fat oxidizes, it breaks down into harmful sub-components such as advanced lipid oxidation end products (ALEs) and oxidized LA metabolites (OXLAMs). These ALEs and OXLAMs present their own threats to your health.

One type of advanced lipid oxidation end product (ALE) is 4HNE, a mutagen known to cause DNA damage. Studies have shown there's a definite correlation between elevated levels of 4HNE and heart failure. LA

breaks down into 4HNE even faster when the oil is heated, which is why cardiologists recommend avoiding fried foods. LA intake and the subsequent ALEs and OXLAMs produced also play a significant role in cancer.

HNE and other ALEs are extraordinarily harmful even in exceedingly small quantities. While excess sugar is certainly bad for your health and should typically be limited to 25 grams per day or less, I believe LA is far more damaging overall.

"These substances increase oxidative stress and our levels of reactive oxygen species. Lustig explained the risk.

"We have a metabolic burden of reactive oxygen species (ROS) that are doing damage if you can't quench them. That's why we have antioxidants in our body—glutathione, vitamin E—[they're] basically the sink for those reactive oxygen species," he said.

You can almost think of ROS as fire that your body can use for various important functions, including immune response. But that fire poses a problem when you can't put it out.

"[ROS] is a normal byproduct of metabolism. The point is we're supposed to be able to quench them. You can only quench them

The best way to ensure you are getting proper nutrition is to cook at home using unprocessed ingredients.

Corn and sugar are at the top of a deadly food pyramid of disease-causing ingredients.

if you get the antioxidants into you," he said.

"The problem is as soon as you've taken the germ out of the grain kernel, you've basically reduced your antioxidant consumption by tenfold. So, we are antioxidant deficient because of food processing, which then leaves us vulnerable to the ravages of ROS from multiple sources including our own mitochondria."

Real Food Is the Answer

The key, then, is to eat whole food, which is naturally rich in fiber and low in sugar. On a side note, free radicals are not all bad. They're also biological signaling molecules, and why this book is complete. It's laid out for all the stakeholders, including government, as to what has to happen and why.

The best way is to get your antioxidants from your food, and real food not only provides antioxidants, but also doesn't create excessive ROS, so you get help from both ends. As for the type of diet you choose, any diet can work, provided it's right for your metabolism. The only diet that does not work for anyone is a processed food diet.

Solutions, Solutions

Now that you know the root problems, what solutions does Lustig suggest? For starters, education alone is not enough, he says. We need education plus implementation. And that requires a different societal response.

"The way I describe it is that there's personal intervention, which for the lack of a better word we can call rehab, and societal intervention, which for lack of a better word we can call laws. Rehab and laws for everything that is a hedonic substance—you need both," he said.

The first step of personal intervention is figuring out if you're sick. "And don't ask your doctor because they don't know how to figure it out," Lustig said. In Chapter 9 of his book, he lists clues that can help you

self-diagnose.

In terms of addressing your health problems, your primary "treatment" will be to make possibly significant changes to how you shop and eat. As a general, easy-to-follow rule, if it has a label, don't buy it. Real food does not have ingredient labels. Lustig's book also includes guidance on how to read food labels in cases where you might not have an option.

"We also need societal intervention. The problem is the food industry doesn't want any societal intervention because this is their gravy train. So, the question is, how do you do this?" he said.

Normally we would do it through legislation, but the food industry has completely co-opted the entire legislative branch; 338 out of 535 congressmen take money from the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), and agriculture is their fourth [largest] contributor after petroleum, tobacco, and pharma.

Barring legislative success, we're left with litigation. Already, there are a number of lawsuits in the works, several of which Lustig is a part of. Ultimately, we must restructure the entire food system so that all stakeholders benefit.

"And we have to demonstrate to them how they can benefit," Lustig said.

Subsidies Are the Biggest Hindrance to Change

Can the food industry make money selling real food? Lustig believes the answer is yes, and in his book, he details how real food makes both financial and ecological sense. The key is to remove subsidies, which currently grease the wheels of the processed food industry.

"The subsidies are the single biggest blockade," Lustig said. "They're the single biggest obstacle to being able to fix the food supply because that's what's making processed food cheap. The Giannini Foundation at UC Berkeley did a back of envelope calculation several years ago.

"What would the price of food look like if we got rid of all food subsidies? It turns out that the price of food wouldn't change. People say it would go up. No, it wouldn't. It would not change except for two items. Two items would go up: Sugar and corn [used for high-fructose corn syrup]. So, basically, that would reduce consumption of the primary toxin in our diet that's causing the most trouble.

"The food industry ... can make more money doing the right thing provided we get rid of the subsidies or make the subsidies for real food so that they can make money selling the right thing. This requires the government. There's no way around it. That's why this book is complete. It's laid out for all the stakeholders, including government, as to what has to happen and why.

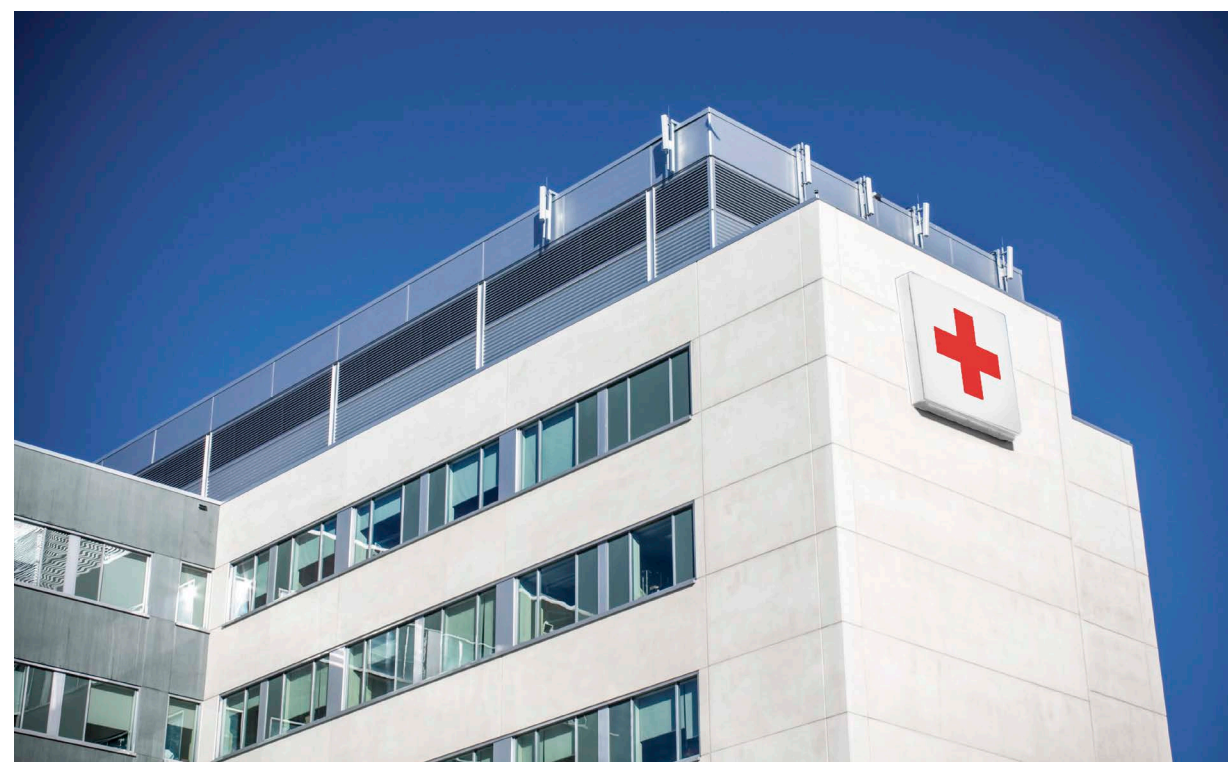
"I wrote this book for everyone to understand the same principles all at once, so that we can actually have an argument and a debate and hopefully come to the table about the facts, because until we do that, there will be no solving this problem. If everyone comes to the table, honestly, and admits to what the issue is, what the problem is, we can, in fact, solve it."

To learn more, be sure to pick up a copy of Lustig's book, "Metaboficial: The Lure and the Lies of Processed Food, Nutrition, and Modern Medicine." You can also find a wealth of information on his website, RobertLustig.com, including media appearances, audio recordings, video lectures, books, articles, and upcoming events where you can hear him speak.

Dr. Joseph Mercola is the founder of Mercola.com. An osteopathic physician, best-selling author, and recipient of multiple awards in the field of natural health, his primary vision is to change the modern health paradigm by providing people with a valuable resource to help them take control of their health. This article was originally published on Mercola.com

Subsidized corn and sugar are essential to the profitability of the processed food industry.

Many medical treatments attempt to treat diseases caused by poor diet with drugs that can only reduce the symptoms.



WISE HABITS

A Well-Lived Life of Purpose

Finding meaningful ways to contribute offers many people their best life

LEO BABAUTA

Most of the people I know and work with want a life of meaning and purpose. Just getting by is not sufficient.

But this isn't taught in schools, and most of us feel unsure of how to move toward this meaningful life.

This article won't be a complete answer to living a life of purpose, but it will try to help you move in that direction.

Commitment

The first thing you might consider is committing yourself to finding a life of purpose. How important is that to you? Are you willing to move into uncertainty for this, or are comfort and safety more important to you at the moment?

To commit, you have to commit in the gut. To tell yourself that this is important enough to devote yourself to, to dedicate time to, to practice pushing through the discomfort and uncertainty that will inevitably arise. Commit to yourself clearly by putting it on paper. Then share your commitment with others.

Exploration

If you don't already have a good sense of what your purpose may be, the second thing to consider is embarking on an adventure of exploring your purpose. It's not as simple as asking, "What would I like to do?" or doing a web search for the answer. You have to explore it, and bringing a sense of adventure might be just the right approach.

Here's how I usually recommend exploring purpose:

1. Make a list of things you think might be meaningful to you—helping children in need, helping people reduce stress, traveling to help communities in need, and so forth. Put anything on the list that's even remotely possible or inter-

esting, don't limit yourself here. Hint: I've found that the most meaningful things are when you're helping other people with something you care about.

2. Ask yourself which three to five of these potential purposes would be most meaningful. If one really stands out—maybe it's the thing you've been wanting to do for years—then that's where to start. But maybe you're not sure, so pick three to five. This is your short list.
3. Of those, let your gut choose the top one. If you absolutely don't know, either choose randomly or ask a friend. This isn't your final answer, but just the one you're going to start with.
4. Choose a two-week version of this top possibility. For example, if you want to help people with stress, could you help one person over video calls and email for two weeks? This is the mini-version of your possible purpose. Explore this for two weeks, really pouring yourself into it.
5. If this really resonates, make a one-month version of it and continue to explore. If it doesn't, pick the next thing on your short list. Do a two-week version of that. Repeat until you find something to explore for a month or longer.

This is the iterative method of purpose exploration. You try a mini-version of something for a couple weeks. Maybe longer. And keep doing this until you hit on something.

Notice if you feel like avoiding this process, or a part of the process. This is your uncertainty showing up as fear. That's completely OK, but you might ask whether you'd like to get support with that uncer-

Make a list of things you think might be meaningful to you.

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▲ If you can serve others, make their lives better in some small way (or a big way), it feels incredibly meaningful.

tainty, so you don't have to be stopped.

This is where friends and loved ones can come in, or supportive communities of like-minded people.

A Well-Lived Life

There are an infinite number of possibilities for what a well-lived life can be for each person. You might meditate on a mountain for years, or enjoy the simple things. You might enjoy time with loved ones, or explore culinary pleasures. You might read all day, or listen to music. You might get your work done, and come home satisfied from a job well done.

For me, one of the biggest components of a well-lived life—other than loved ones and a profound appreciation of life—is doing something that feels meaningful. And that has usually been helping others with something that's meaningful to them.

If you can serve others, make their lives better in some small way (or a big way), it feels incredibly meaningful. Much more than simply traveling or building up wealth or enjoying good food or having fun. Those are all great, but they don't feel as meaningful to me. If you can hit on something like that, that feels meaningful, then a well-lived life becomes simple.

Take care of yourself. Find profound appreciation for the joy of life.

And serve others in a meaningful way. It's simple, but not always easy. And that makes it even richer.

Leo Babauta is the author of six books, the writer of Zen Habits, a blog with over 2 million subscribers, and the creator of several online programs to help you master your habits. Visit ZenHabits.net

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