

# Lubbock County Family Network



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## **Sorting Food Facts and Myths: Do Food Labeled as “Natural” Deliver on Your Expectations?**

Have you ever bought one brand of food instead of another because it was described as “natural?” Are you paying more for a food labeled as “natural?” What does “natural” mean to you?

The manufacturer may have a different meaning.



### **What Consumers Think “Natural” Means**

A 2015 Consumer Reports survey of a nationally representative group of 1,005 adults found more than half of consumers usually look for products with a “natural” food label.

Many consumers thought a “natural” label on packaged/processed foods currently meant:

- No toxic pesticides were used (63%)
- No artificial materials or chemicals were used during processing (62%)
- No artificial ingredients or colors were used (61%)
- No GMOs (Genetically modified Organisms) were used (60%).

An even greater percentage (about 80%) felt these characteristics were what the label SHOULD mean.

Consumers were asked if they believed a “natural” label needed to be verified or meet some type of standard, and they answered Yes, (45%); No (51%); and Unsure (4%).

A 2016 International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation Food and Health Survey (1,003 adults) found “healthfulness” was a top driver in food purchasing decisions. Consumers responding to a choice of definitions about healthy eating styles chose the following top three:

- “the right mix of foods” (51%)

- “limited or no artificial preservatives or ingredients” (41%)
- “natural” (37%)

When asked to describe what “natural” means, there were a range of responses in relation to food. These included: “no additives or preservatives,” made from “natural ingredients” and “straight from nature.”

### **FDA’s Definition of “Natural”**

in response to the uncertainty of the meaning of “natural,” in 2016 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) asked for public comments on such questions as:

- “Whether it is appropriate to define the term ‘natural,’
- If so, how the agency should define ‘natural,’ and
- How the agency should determine appropriate use of the term on food labels.”

They are currently reviewing those comments. At present:

“The FDA has considered the term ‘natural’ to mean that nothing artificial or synthetic (including all color additives regardless of source) has been included in, or has been added to, a food that would not normally be expected to be in that food. However, this policy was not intended to address food production methods, such as the use or pesticides, nor did it explicitly address food processing or manufacturing methods, such as thermal technologies, pasteurization, or irradiation. The FDA also did not consider whether the term ‘natural’ should describe any nutritional or other health benefit.”

### **USDA’s Definition of “Natural” for Meat**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service, the term “natural” on a meat or poultry label means:

“A product containing no artificial ingredient or added color and is only minimally processed. Minimal processing means that the product was processed in a manner that does not fundamentally alter the product. The label must include a statement explaining the meaning of the term natural (such as ‘no artificial ingredients; minimally processed’).”

### The Bottom Line

Unless a standardized definition is developed for “natural,” this term means little more than no artificial ingredient or added color is present in the food. In addition, in the case of meat and poultry, it also should be minimally processed. If you are seeking a specific attribute in a “natural” produce, don’t pay extra unless the label provides enough information ensuring you are getting what you are looking for.

### References:

- *Bock, Andrea. Peeling Back the ‘Natural’ Food Label, Consumer Reports at <http://www.consumerreports.org/food-safety/peeling-back-the-natural-food-label/>*
- **Consumer Reports National Research Center, Natural Food Labels survey at [https://www.consumerreports.org/content/dam/cro/magazine-articles/2016/March/Consumer\\_Reports\\_Natural\\_Food\\_Labels\\_Survey\\_2015.pdf](https://www.consumerreports.org/content/dam/cro/magazine-articles/2016/March/Consumer_Reports_Natural_Food_Labels_Survey_2015.pdf)**
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- *United States Department of Agriculture / Food Safety & Inspection Service. Meat and Poultry Labeling Terms at <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/food-labeling/meat-and-poultry-labeling-terms>*

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Source: Alice Henneman, MS, RDN ● [ahenneman@unl.edu](mailto:ahenneman@unl.edu) ● [food.unl.edu](http://food.unl.edu)

### You Can Help Prevent Accidents

As a parent, you plan an essential role in the safety of your children. You have probably thought about car seat safety, cords on window coverings, and how to prevent drowning or burns. But what about laundry safety?



Children act fast and accidents can happen in an instant. Accidents involving liquid laundry packets can easily be prevented with safe use and storage.

You can make a difference by ensuring you and your friends and family are properly using and storing liquid laundry packets by keeping them up high and out of reach of young children.

### Prevention is simple.

1. Make it a habit to always store packets out of reach and sight of children.
2. Always store laundry packets in their original container or pouch until they are ready to be used.
3. Do not let children handle laundry packets.
4. Be sure to read the product label before use.

The liquid in these pre-measured packets is harmful if put in the mouth, swallowed, or gets in the eye. Immediately call Poison Help at 1-800-222-1222 if there is an accident.

Locking detergent packets up in a cabinet is an effective way to keep these products out of reach of young children, especially when little ones begin exploring closets and cabinets at an early age.

**About ACI:** ACI is dedicated to improving the Health and Quality of life of consumers through sustainable cleaning products and practices. **About The Key Pledge campaign:** The KEY Pledge campaign has been educating parents and caregivers on the importance of practicing laundry safety at home and around young children since 2013.

Source:

<http://www.cleaninginstitute.org/assets/1/Page/Poison-Prevention-Activity-Sheet2.pdf>

### Quick Spring-Cleaning Tips

Plan your work, then work your plan. You’ve heard that before and it works for spring-cleaning, too. Nancy Bock, Senior Vice President, Meetings and Education at the American Cleaning Institute® say you can tackle your spring-cleaning in even the smallest chunks of time. Each of the tasks on our list takes just a few minutes, so you can decide how many you can squeeze into your already busy day.

Prep:

- Inventory your supplies and add what is missing to your grocery list.
- Make a to-do list for what you want to clean, then divide it up by task or room.

Window Blinds/Curtains:

- If you try to clean all the blinds in one day, chances are that you may not be as thorough on the later ones. Pace yourself and only clean one or two windows (or one room) a day.
- Take down curtains to wash or take to the cleaners or vacuum them and use a fabric refresher to neutralize any odors.

**Walls:**

- Use a vacuum with a soft brush attachment on the hose to clean up any cobwebs in the corners.

**Ceiling fans:**

- Wipe or vacuum the blades first to get any loose dust, then spray your cleaning cloth to keep any cleaning product from staining your ceiling.

**Upholstered furniture:**

- Vacuum the cushions and under them.
- Use a fabric refresher to neutralize any odors.

To read more, go to the website below:

- [Safety](#)
- [Cleaning ABCs \(Allergy, Bacteria and Clutter\)](#)
- [Set a cleaning schedule](#)
- [Tips for using fabric refreshers](#)

Source:

[http://www.cleaninginstitute.org/clean\\_living/quick\\_springcleaning\\_tips.aspx](http://www.cleaninginstitute.org/clean_living/quick_springcleaning_tips.aspx)

### What's the Deal with Sugar?

According to Forbes, the average American consumes over 130 pounds of sugar each year. That is 2 ½ pounds per American every week. This is an alarming amount of sugar consumption which is significant to our current obesity epidemic.

#### Where Does Sugar Come From?

There are two types of sugar that occur in food, and they are known as natural sugars and added sugars. **Natural sugars** are naturally found in foods such as fruit and milk. **Added sugars** include any sugar or caloric sweetener that is added to foods and beverages to improve the overall flavor and to extend the shelf life. Added sugars and syrups can be used in the preparation of an item such as putting sugar in coffee or cereal. They can also be added while the food is being processed such as high fructose corn syrup. Added sugars are commonly found in:

- sugar-sweetened beverages
- grain-based desserts
- fruit drinks
- dairy desserts
- candy
- ready-to-eat cereals
- yeast breads

In the American diet, sugar-sweetened beverages make up the largest source of added sugars. The American Heart Association suggests that they should be limited to no more than 36 ounces a week.

#### Is Sugar Really Bad for Me?

A study published in 2013 by the Journal of the American Heart Association displayed strong evidence that sugar can actually affect the pumping mechanism of your heart and could increase the risk for heart failure in those who consume high amounts of sugar in their diets.

Sugar alone does not cause diabetes; however, it does increase the risk of developing obesity, high triglycerides, high blood pressure and high cholesterol that does pose a higher risk for developing diabetes.

The Dietary Guideline for Americans 2010, states that “although the body’s response to sugar does not depend on whether they are naturally present in food or added to foods, sugars found naturally in foods are part of the food’s total package of nutrients and other healthful components. In contrast, many foods that contain added sugars often supply calories, but few or no essential nutrients and no dietary fiber. Both naturally occurring sugars and added sugars increase the risk of dental caries.”

#### How Much Sugar Can I Have?

The American Heart Association recommendations are based on sugar in general and suggest that added sugar should be limited as much as possible to maintain a healthy diet. The AHA recommendations are as follows:

- No more than 6 teaspoons or 100 calories a day of sugar for women.
- No more than 9 teaspoons or 150 calories a day for men.

Research shows the average American is consuming 22 teaspoons of sugar a day, which is equivalent to 355 calories. To put this in perspective, a 12oz soda has about 8 teaspoons of sugar or 132 calories.

#### How Much Sugar Am I Really Consuming?

Look at the food label when trying to determine how much sugar you are actually eating. In the nutrition facts portion, sugar is listed under carbohydrates and typically wrote in the form of grams. **There are 4 calories per gram of sugar and 4 grams per teaspoon of sugar.** So if the label says it has 20 grams of sugar, that is 5 teaspoons, or about 80 calories from sugar.

You can also look on the front of the label to get an idea of how much sugar is in a product. The label may include one of the following:

- **Sugar-Free** – less than 0.5 g of sugar per serving.
- **Reduced Sugar or Less Sugar** – at least 25% less sugar per serving compared to a standard serving size of the traditional variety.
- **No Added Sugars or Without Added Sugars** – no sugar or sugar-containing ingredient such as juice or dry fruit is added during processing.
- **Low Sugar** – not defined or allowed as a claim on food labels.

It is also a great idea to look at the ingredients. Words that end in “ose” (dextrose, fructose, glucose, lactose, maltose, sucrose) mean sugar. Other ingredients commonly found include: corn sweetener, corn syrup, fruit juice concentrates, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, malt sugar and molasses.

### Are Artificial Sugars a Good Alternative to Added Sugar?

Unlike regular sugar, artificial sweeteners do not contribute to tooth decay and cavities. They appeal to consumers because they contain virtually no calories compared to added sugars and are typically much sweeter. Currently the FDA recognizes artificial sweeteners as GRAS which stands for “generally recognized as safe.” To be considered safe, they should be consumed in moderation; as large amounts of consumption have been known to cause diarrhea. Common artificial sweeteners include:

- Aspartame (NutraSweet® and Equal®)
- Acesulfame-K (Sweet One®)
- Neotame
- Saccharin (Sweet’N Low®)
- Sucralose (Splenda®)

### How Can I Limit Sugar in My Diet?

**Toss the table sugar.** Cut back on the amount of sugar added to things commonly consumed; like cereal, pancakes, coffee or tea. Try cutting the usual amount of sugar you add by half and wean down from there.

**Swap out the soda.** Buy sugar-free or low-calorie beverages. Water is always the best choice!

**Eat fresh, frozen, dried or canned fruits.** Choose fruit canned in water or natural juice. Avoid fruit canned in syrup. Drain and rinse in a colander to remove excess juice.

**Compare food labels and choose products with the lowest amounts of *added* sugars.**

Dairy and fruit products will contain natural sugars. Added sugars can be identified in the ingredients list.

**Add fruit.** Instead of adding sugar to cereal or oatmeal, try fresh fruit or dried fruit.

**Cut the serving back.** When baking cookies, brownies or cakes, cut the sugar called for in your recipe by half. Most of the time, you won’t even notice a difference.

**Try extracts.** Instead of adding sugar in recipes, use extracts like almond, vanilla, orange or lemon.

**Replace it completely.** Enhance foods with spices instead of sugar. Try ginger, allspice, cinnamon or nutmeg.

**Substitute.** Switch out sugar with unsweetened applesauce in recipes and use equal amounts.

By limiting the daily amount of sugar consumed, individuals are more likely to: maintain a healthy weight, decrease your risk of heart disease, diabetes and dental decay.

Sources: American Heart Association: Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010; Forbes

Prepared by: Jacie Vasek, TTU Dietetic Intern 2015

### Diet and Memory: Are They Related?

We have all heard the saying “You are what you eat”. We know now more than ever how true this is. The old doctor Hippocrates once said “Let food be thy medicine, and let medicine be thy food” to make the point that what you eat can act as a remedy. As we all know, the older we get the harder it is to remember things. This is a natural thing but what if we could delay memory loss by the way we eat?

#### Memory and Diet Connection

Memory loss is often characterized by cells in the brain that no longer communicate or communicate more slowly, most commonly due to dead brain cells or inflammation in the brain. Harvard Medical School has published studies suggesting that those with high cholesterol levels are at higher risk for memory loss and Alzheimer’s. High cholesterol levels can damage blood vessels that carry oxygen to the brain which can trigger memory loss. High blood sugars have also been shown to speed up memory loss making diabetes a risk factor for dementia. Managing your diet can not only help reduce your risk for diseases but prolong the onset of memory loss or even improve your memory abilities.

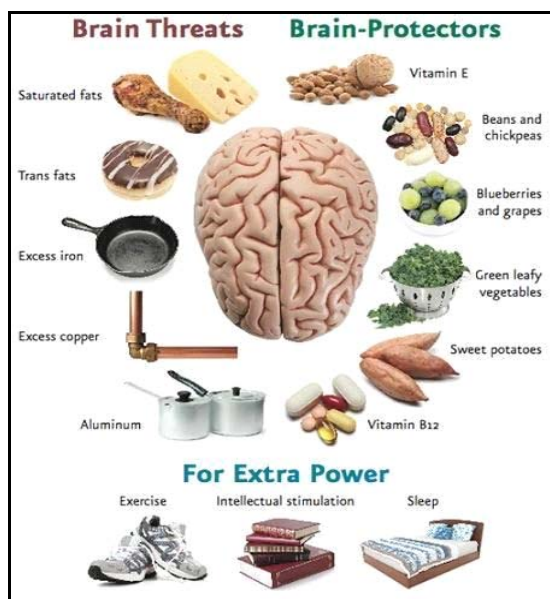
#### Foods That May Cause Memory Loss

Although there is a genetic component to how early you may experience simple memory loss or even Alzheimer’s, you can delay it as long as possible by eating a better diet. The foods that can be a trigger for memory loss are those that also cause inflammation:

- Microwave Popcorn
  - Contains diacetyl which may increase amyloid plaques that have been linked to Alzheimer’s
- Beer
  - Contains nitrites which has been linked to Alzheimer’s

- Refined Grains & Sugar
  - White bread, flour, pastas, rice, and sugar
  - May cause insulin spike that can be harmful
- Processed meats
  - Contains nitrosamines that triggers the liver to release chemicals that are toxic to the brain

It is important to note that this does not mean you have to stop eating these foods. This means you should eat these brain protectors more often.



### Foods That May Help Memory

As we mentioned earlier inflammation in the brain is the leading cause for memory loss and Alzheimer's onset, therefore eating foods that can reduce inflammation is the key.

- Leafy Green Vegetables
  - Great source of vitamins and minerals
- Salmon/Cold Water Fish
  - Omega-3 fatty acids help reduce inflammation
- Berries and Dark Skinned Fruit
  - Antioxidants help reduce inflammation
- Extra-Virgin Olive Oil
  - Omega-3 fatty acids help reduce inflammation
- Walnuts and other tree nuts
  - Rich in Omega-3 fatty acids

### Is There A Diet I Can Follow?

Interestingly, many of the foods that help reduce inflammation are all foods that are common in the *Mediterranean Diet*. This diet is famous for helping heart health but also is great for overall health, including memory. The basic components of the diet are fruits, vegetables, and whole-grains as the carbohydrates. Less red meat and more fish that are high in Omega-3 fats as the main protein source. Oils like olive oil instead of butter to

reduce saturated fats and increase unsaturated fats. A sample diet for one day can be:

- Breakfast
  - Yogurt with blueberries and chopped walnuts
- Lunch
  - Greek Salad with grilled chicken or shrimp
- Dinner
  - Baked salmon with lemon and garlic with asparagus cooked in olive oil.

Remember to try to eat 4-5 vegetables, 3-4 fruits, 2 protein, 3 dairy and 5-6 grains with 3 grains being whole grains every day.

### Other Thoughts

Apart from changing parts of your diet, there are several other things you can do to preserve your memory as long as possible. Exercise has been shown to help with memory. Doing crossword puzzles or other mind stimulating activities keep the brain engaged longer. Quitting smoking and excessive alcohol consumption along with a good night's sleep will go a long way in prolonging your mental and physical health.



### References:

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- <http://www.alzheimers.net/2014-01-02/foods-that-induce-memory-loss/>
- <http://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/boost-your-memory-by-eating-right>
- <http://www.eatright.org/resource/health/wellness/healthy-aging/memory-boosting-foods>

Prepared by: Raul Palacios, TTU Dietetic Intern 2017

### Recipe Corner



Enjoy this quick and easy breakfast make ahead casserole on busy weekend mornings. The Recipe can be easily halved and baked in a 9x9x2-inch pan.

#### Brunch for A Bunch-Baked Eggs

8 slices bread, cubed  
 2 lbs. Sausage, browned and drained  
 ½ cup grated Cheddar cheese  
 1 dozen eggs  
 2¼ cups milk  
 ¾ teaspoon dry mustard  
 ½ cup chopped onion  
 ¼ cup chopped green pepper  
 1 can (10¾ ozs.) Cream of mushroom soup  
 ½ cup milk

Grease a 13x9x2-inch pan. Spread bread cubes in bottom of pan; top with sausage, then cheese. Beat or mix in blender the eggs, milk, mustard. Add onion, and green pepper. Pour egg mixture over ingredients in pan. Refrigerate 1 hour or overnight. Mix together mushroom soup and milk; pour over other ingredients. Bake at 300 degrees for 1½ hours. Makes 12 servings.

Source: Southwestern Public Service Co. Thirty Years of Festive Foods

Happy Spring!

Sincerely,

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