

THE BIG IDEAS

The Food System

Is broken.

The Food Fix

What you can do.

Your Food Label

Is lying to you.

Junk Science

To promote junk food.

Social Justice

The hidden oppression of food.

Regenerative Ag

Is where it's at.

Food Fix

How to Save Our Health, Our Economy, Our Communities, and Our Planet—
One Bite at a Time

BY DR. MARK HYMAN, MD · LITTLE, BROWN SPARK © 2020 · 400 PAGES

“There is one place that nearly everything that matters in the world today converges: our food and our food system—the complex web of how we grow food, how we produce, distribute, and promote it; what we eat, what we waste, and the policies that perpetuate unimaginable suffering and destruction across the globe that deplete our human, social, economic, and natural capital.

Food is the nexus of most of our world’s health, economic, environmental, climate, social, and even political crises. While this may seem like an exaggeration, it is not. The problem is much worse than we think. After reading *Food Fix* you will be able to connect the dots of this largely invisible crisis and understand why fixing our food system is central to the health and well-being of our population, our environment, our climate, our economy, and our very survival as a species. You will also understand the forces, businesses, and policies driving the catastrophe, and the people, businesses, and governments that are providing hope and a path to fixing our dysfunctional food system.”

~ Mark Hyman, MD from *Food Fix*

Mark Hyman, MD, is head of strategy for the Cleveland Clinic Center for Functional Medicine and board president for the Institute for Functional Medicine. He is also the bestselling author of a number of books, including *Eat Fat, Get Thin*.

This is a very important and equally sobering book. As Mark says: “*The story of food shocked me, frightened me, and drove me to tell this story and to find the possibility of redemption from the broken system that is slowly destroying the people and things we love most.*”

Now, of course, the food we eat affects our health and well-being. Actually, after I typed that, I realized that the “of course” part ISN’T a given. Many people STILL don’t see the connection between our food choices and our health and the fact (yes, it’s a fact) that our poor food choices are driving the astonishing rates of chronic disease we all face.

What might be less obvious is that the food system we have in place—ranging from the subsidies and other public policies—affect EVERYTHING from our physical health to our psychological health to our cultural well-being to the health of our economies and our environment.

Mark connects all those dots. He tells us this: “*If we were to identify one big lever to pull to improve global health, create economic abundance, reduce social injustice and mental illness, restore environmental health, and reverse climate change, it would be transforming our entire food system. That is the most important work of our time—work that must begin now.*”

This is one of those books on which it is nearly impossible to do a Note. Nearly every paragraph of every page of my copy of the book is marked up—often with a “:/” representing my “ARE YOU KIDDING ME?!” appalled astonishment at just how viciously many individuals—from politicians to food corp executives—are abusing their power and ignoring the public good.

“If we were to identify one big lever to pull to improve global health, create economic abundance, reduce social injustice and mental illness, restore environmental health, and reverse climate change, it would be transforming our entire food system. That is the most important work of our time—work that must begin now.”

~ Dr. Mark Hyman, MD

"It is a wonderful feeling to recognize the unity of a complex of phenomena that to direct observation appear to be quite separate things."

~ Albert Einstein

"Children born today are expected to live shorter, sicker lives than their parents. The average child born today will live five fewer years than their parents, and if they are poor or socially disadvantaged, they will live 10 to 20 fewer years than their parents."

~ Dr. Mark Hyman, MD

"For every 10 percent of your diet that comes from processed food, your risk of death goes up 14 percent."

~ Dr. Mark Hyman, MD

Like I said, it's a sobering, challenging, confronting read. It's also, ultimately, a hopeful read as Mark gives us some compelling Ideas on how we can go about SOLVING the crises along with a cast of heroic characters who are doing the hard work to serve us and change the world.

If you'd like to learn more about "How to Save Our Health, Our Economy, Our Communities, and Our Planet—One Bite at a Time," I think you'll appreciate this book as much as I did. (You can get a copy of the book [here](#).) (And check out [FoodFixBook.com](#) and [FoodFix.org](#).)

Of course, it's packed with Big Ideas and I'm excited to share of my favorites that will help us take powerful steps forward TODAY, so let's jump straight in.

THE (BROKEN) FOOD SYSTEM

"While Democrats argue to create Medicare for All and Republicans argue to reduce entitlements to bring down our \$22 trillion national debt, both are missing the obvious fact. Fix the reason why we have those costs in the first place. Stop the flow of sick people into the system and the harm to our environment and climate by fixing the cause: the food system. ..."

Yet most of our government's policies promote the growing, producing, marketing, sale, and consumption of the worst diet on the planet—billions in subsidies (known as crop insurance or other supports) for commodity crops turned into food and food for factory-farmed animals; \$75 billion a year in food stamps payments that effectively reduce hunger but are mostly for processed food and soda; unregulated food marketing of soda and junk food; confusing food labels; industry-influenced dietary guidelines; and more."

Welcome to Chapter #1: "The True Cost of Food—The Health, Economic, Environmental, and Climate Impact of Our Food System" in which we get our first sobering look at reality AND introduced to the solution.

I could pick any one of a number of alarming stats to make the point here. For now, get this: "Chronic disease is now the single biggest threat to global economic development. Lifestyle-caused diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer now kill nearly 50 million people a year, more than twice as many as die from infectious disease. Two billion people go to bed overweight and 800 million go to bed hungry in the world today. One in two Americans and one in four teenagers have pre-diabetes or type 2 diabetes."

Note: You know how much that will cost us economically (not to mention emotionally as we and our loved ones struggle with that onslaught of chronic disease)? 95 TRILLION dollars over the next 35 years. Just in the United States alone. (Note: That estimate is 91 percent of the total tax collected by the US government.)

Get the book for the full sobering picture regarding the food systems impact on our health, economics, culture and environment. For now, a quick look at the SOLUTION.

Mark shares a story about a time he spoke at the World Economic Forum where he asked a simple question. He says: "It was after a distinguished panel focused on fixing health care by better health information technology, improved care coordination, reduction in medical errors, improved efficiencies, and improved payment models, all necessary but not sufficient. Their plan was akin to moving the deck chairs around on the Titanic.

Here was the question: Wouldn't it make more sense to address the root cause of chronic disease that are driving the costs, rather than trying to clean up after the fact? The room of 300 people went silent. It was as if I had just revealed the meaning of life. Afterward the panel moderator, the dean of Columbia University's School of Public Health, told me how profound the insight was and how all the health leaders were talking about it after. Really? I was shocked. This is so obvious, yet no one had thought of it."

Yep. That's the way to Fix a huge problem. FIND THE ROOT CAUSE!!!

" People are fed by the food industry, which pays no attention to health, and are healed by the health industry, which pays no attention to food."

~ Wendell Berry

FOOD FIX: WHAT YOU CAN DO

"Stop drinking sugary beverages. If you've gotten this far, then my next recommendation probably goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway: Don't drink sugar. The best way to reform the food system is to make sugar-laden foods less profitable. If consumers demand healthy products, then eventually companies will have to comply. It's not just soda. Fruit juice has a health halo. But don't be fooled by its vitamins and antioxidants. Fruit juice is loaded with sugar and is just as harmful as soda. Avoid buying it, and certainly don't give it to your children. Cutting sugar-sweetened beverages from your diet is the single-biggest thing you can do to improve your health."

That's from a chapter called "Leveraging Fiscal Policies to Address Obesity and Chronic Diseases" in Part I of the book called "The Health and Economic Impact of Our Food System."

For the record: Part II is on "The Dirty Politics of Food" while Part III is on "Information Warfare," Part IV is on "Food and Society: The Destruction of Our Human and Intellectual Capital," and Part V is on "The Environmental and Climate Impact of Our Food System."

<- We could write a Note on any individual chapter within any one of those sections.

Each chapter ends with a section called "Food Fix: What You Can Do" in which we are given some big and little things we can do to play our roles well. The #1 Fix for this section and arguably THE biggest single lever we can pull? Simple: **STOP DRINKING SUGARY BEVERAGES**. Why? Two reasons. One personal and the other structural.

First, the personal: "Cutting sugar-sweetened beverages from your diet is the single-biggest thing you can do to improve your health." <- Note: That's a POWERFUL STATEMENT!!!

Again: The SINGLE-BIGGEST THING WE CAN DO TO IMPROVE OUR HEALTH? **STOP DRINKING SUGARY BEVERAGES**. Am I shouting? Yes, I am.

Second, we have a structural/societal issue: "The best way to reform the food system is to make sugar-laden foods less profitable." <- Big Food and Big Soda companies make WAY too much money making us WAY too sick. And, we make it way too easy for them with our buying habits AND our subsidies and other policies like allowing their sugary drinks to be purchased via SNAP while allowing them to spend BILLIONS of dollars advertising to our kids (most countries radically limit this), etc. One more time: **STOP DRINKING SUGARY BEVERAGES**. Today.

P.S. We've talked about all this many times before but, it's important, so I will remind you: "Fruit juice is loaded with sugar and is just as harmful as soda. Avoid buying it, and certainly don't give it to your children." <- PARENTS: Are you still giving your kids fruit juice thinking it's a healthy drink? IT'S NOT!!!

YOUR FOOD LABEL IS LYING

" Ultraprocessed foods and the food system that produces them are at the root of the chronic diseases that account for 80 percent of the deaths from noncommunicable disease worldwide (heart disease, diabetes, cancer, etc)."

~ Dr. Mark Hyman, MD

"Companies are required to list ingredients in the order of their pre-dominance. But that doesn't tell you how much is in the package. If sugar is the second ingredient listed on a package, that doesn't tell you if it makes up 30 percent of the food or 5 percent.

Have you ever picked up a jar of strawberry jam at the supermarket and looked at its ingredient list? A jar of Smucker's strawberry jam lists strawberries as the first ingredient, and then the second, third, and fourth ingredients are as follows: high-fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, and sugar. This tactic is very common. The reason companies often use several sweeteners in one product is so they don't have to list 'sugar' as the first ingredient. As [Jerold] Mande[, a nutrition expert who worked on food labels at the FDA and USDA,] explained, 'What we know from some investigations is that companies often use five different sugars in their products so that they don't show up high on the list.'"

" Eat real food, or if you have packaged food, make sure every ingredient is something you recognize or would have in your kitchen and use in cooking. No one has azodicarbonamide, mono- or diglycerides, BHT, or carrageenan in their cupboards. An egg or an almond or avocado doesn't have an ingredient list or nutrition facts label."

~ Dr. Mark Hyman, MD

That's from Chapter #9 called "The FDA Is Not Doing Its Job to Protect Us" in Part II on "The Dirty Politics of Food." Let's think about that for a moment.

Of course, we have food labels so we can get a sense of what's actually in our food. And, naturally, the ingredients are listed in the order of their pre-dominance.

Now... Can you imagine being in the strategic discussion at Smucker's (and countless other Big Food companies) and coming up with the idea to use three different types of sugar so that "strawberries" could remain at the top of the ingredients list so an unsuspecting customer will pick it up, take a quick glance and then say, "Strawberries. Awesome. Must be healthy!"?

I'm shaking my head as I type that... The book is packed with countless examples of how various stakeholders are manipulating their products and public policy without regard to our health. So... I ask: Can you (and should you) trust a company that does that? Can you (and should you) support a company that does that by buying their products? I don't think so. You?

(btw: If you feel so inspired, go check out your pantry and take a glance at your food labels. And, remember: We vote for the world we want to create with every dollar we spend.)

JUNK SCIENCE GOES WITH JUNK FOOD

"Science definitively proves that all calories are not the same: Sugar and starch calories act completely differently than calories from fat when you eat them. In a 2018 Harvard study, researchers fed two groups identical numbers of calories, but one group ate 60 percent of calories from fat with less than 20 percent from carbs while the other group had 60 percent from carbs and 10 percent from fat. In the most overweight of the participants, the low-carb, high-fat group burned 400 more calories a day without any more exercise, and while eating the exact same number of calories. Sugar slows your metabolism. Fat speeds it up.

Calories are information, instructions that affect hormones, brain chemistry, the immune system, the microbiome, gene expression, and metabolism. The energy-balance hypothesis is dead—except in the minds of those in the fast-food industry because they have a stake in pushing the idea that weight is all about calories in and calories out. But any third grader could tell you that 1,000 calories of soda and 1,000 calories of broccoli have profoundly different effects on the body."

That's from chapter #10 called "How the Food (Mostly Soda) Industry Co-opts Public Health and Distorts Nutrition Science" in Part III on "Information Warfare."

Imagine that. You bring overweight people into a lab. Give them the same number of calories. But change the proportion of carbs to fat. What happens? Well... If you believe the "energy-balance" theory that is VIGOROUSLY (!!!) promoted by the Food and Soda Industries (and all the other influencers they have co-opted), then NOTHING should be different.

According to their flawed model, a calorie is a calorie and whether you gain or lose weight is entirely based on how many calories you consume via your diet vs. how much you burn via exercise—which is why they try to convince us that we just need to exercise more to lose weight. Only, that's NOT what the independently conducted research shows. We talk about this in depth in Optimal Weight 101 and in many of our Notes including David Ludwig's [Always Hungry?](#), Robert Lustig's [Fat Chance](#) and Gary Taubes's [The Case Against Sugar](#).

Although the Food and Soda Industry try REALLY (!!!) hard to convince us sugar is just another calorie and that a calorie is a calorie, "any third grader could tell you that 1,000 calories of soda and 1,000 calories of broccoli have profoundly different effects on the body."

Mark shares this wisdom in a chapter featuring some ATROCIOUS manipulation done by the former chief scientist at Coke that draws parallels with the equally ATROCIOUS manipulation done by the tobacco industry back in the day.

" As Vani Hari says in her book Feeding You Lies, 'You wouldn't believe a study on cigarettes that was funded by Phillip Morris, and you probably shouldn't believe a study on cereal paid for by a company whose bottom line depends on Froot Loops, Apple Jacks, and Frosted Flakes.'"

~ Dr. Mark Hyman, MD

"With almost ten times as much of this 'junk' research on junk food as of true independent science, the public, the media, and the policy makers stay confused."

~ Dr. Mark Hyman, MD

He tells us: "In total, Coke provided more than \$120 million to US universities, health organizations, and research institutions between 2010 and 2015. From 2008 to 2016 Coke funded 389 articles in 169 journals concluding that physical activity was more important than diet and that soft drinks and sugar are essentially harmless."

Here's another fact to chew on: "The food industry spends more than \$12 billion a year funding nutrition studies (while the NIH [National Institute of Health] spends only \$1 billion), polluting and diluting independent research, and confusing policy makers, the public, and even most doctors and nutritionists. Studies funded by the food industry are eight to fifty times more likely to find a positive outcome for their products."

Mark also talks about how much money Coke and their Big Food/Big Soda brethren pour into health organizations that are supposed to be serving OUR interests not their corporate sponsors.

Get this: "Twix is a health food according to the American Heart Association, in case you weren't aware—and so are Froot Loops, Cocoa Puffs, and French Toast Crunch, right along with the 7 teaspoons of sugar per serving. It shouldn't be called breakfast; it should be called dessert. When you grind it into flour, whole wheat or not, it is worse than sugar. The glycemic index of sugar is 65 and that of whole wheat bread is 75, which means that the bread raises your blood sugar more than table sugar. Below the neck, there is no difference between a bowl of sugar and whole wheat bread. Well, actually, the bread is worse."

THE HIDDEN OPPRESSION OF BIG FOOD

"Of all deaths, 1.1 percent are caused by gun violence. Seventy thousand people die every year from the opioid epidemic. Those problems are real and tragic and need to end. But 70 percent of deaths, or more than 1.7 million deaths a year, are caused by chronic disease such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, and stroke—mostly the result of our toxic food system. More African Americans, Hispanics, and poor people are killed by bad food than anything else. Drive-through fast food kills far more people than drive-by shootings. Yet we remain silent about the role of the food system killing millions of Americans."

That's from a chapter called "The Hidden Oppression of Big Food."

So is this: "A 2016 JAMA landmark study compared the difference in life expectancy between the richest and poorest 1 percent of the population. The difference between those two groups was 15 years for men and 10 years for women. That is equivalent to the loss of life expectancy that results from a lifetime of smoking. More than 38 million Americans live in poverty and almost 100 million live in near poverty."

<- Those numbers are shocking and heart breaking—which is why Mark tells us that "Food is a social justice issue. Our industrial food system is an invisible form of oppression." How? For many reasons including: "The big food companies target black and Hispanic youth with their least nutritious products, including fast food, candy, sugary drinks, and snacks. From 2013 to 2017, food advertising on black-targeted TV increased by 50 percent. Black teens viewed 119 percent more junk-food-related ads—mostly for soda and candy—than white teens."

And, in the Introduction, when walking us through the true cost of food, Mark tells us that "money earned from SNAP makes up about 20 percent of Coca-Cola's annual revenue in the United States. That doesn't include any revenue from noncarbonated sugar drinks like Powerade or Vitaminwater. That makes Coca-Cola a billion-dollar welfare recipient."

Think about that for a second. TWENTY-PERCENT of Coke's revenue comes from our welfare program. Know this: SNAP can't be used to buy tobacco or alcohol. But it CAN be used to buy sugary sodas—which we KNOW directly contribute to chronic disease. Do you know *why* that's the case? Because Coke and their Industry buddies have spent an ENORMOUS amount of money and energy lobbying politicians to make it so (to go with their \$12b of junk science).

"Approximately 60 percent of our calories in the United States come from ultraprocessed foods, with the poor, minorities, the young, and the less educated consuming the most."

~ Dr. Mark Hyman, MD

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

~ Margaret Mead

REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

"Regenerative agriculture on farms, grasslands, and rangelands is the most powerful force for fixing much of what's wrong with agriculture while producing more and better food. And the practice can be adapted across diverse and global environments. ...

We need to quickly and radically change how we grow food and change the food we eat. But our systems and policies make it hard for farmers who want to do the right thing. Farmers growing healthy food, using sustainable, organic, or regenerative methods, often impoverish themselves to grow food for the rich, while conventional corporate farmers supported by our government get rich growing food for the poor. This must change and is changing.

The good news: It turns out that regenerative agriculture is more profitable (for farmers, not Big Ag or Big Food) and produces higher yields and better-quality food, even when used to grow commodity crops (soy, corn, wheat), all while reversing climate change, conserving water, and increasing biodiversity!"

That's from a chapter called "Soil, Water, Biodiversity: Why Should We Care?" in which Mark walks us through how to tackle the environmental consequences of our agricultural practices.

Why should we care about our soil and how we're growing our food and raising our animals for consumption? Because our agricultural practices are the #1 contributor to climate change.

Which is why Mark's proposed Fix is moving from "extractive" agriculture that depletes our natural capital while contributing to global warming to "regenerative agriculture."

Check out the book for more on this and all the other details on what Mark calls "the defining problem of our time."

For now, here's to opening our eyes to the challenges we are facing across a range of domains and re-committing to playing our roles as virtuously as we can as we strive to change the world, one person at a time, together, starting with you and me.

TODAY.

B

Brian Johnson,
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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Founder + CEO of Heroic. He's spent half of the last 25 years as a Founder/CEO and the other half as a Philosopher. Brian loves integrating ancient wisdom and modern science to help YOU become the best, most heroic version of yourself so we can create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by 2051. Learn more at heroic.us.

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