

100% natural foods aren't plastic wrapped

They're everywhere — in your grocery aisles, your cupboards and possibly already in your body.

Don't take another bite. They're imposters! I'm talking about pseudo-health foods.

You've seen these products labeled "lite," "100 percent natural" and "Featherweight." Perhaps you've even bought some of these products, thinking you were making health-conscious purchases.

Cheryl Petersen

If you have, you've been ripped off. In my opinion, the entire "health food" industry and craze is a rip-off, yet it is flourishing.

Everyone seems to worry about their health, but not many seem willing to pay the price. I'm not talking about money. In that sense, people will pay anything to be healthy. But you can't buy health; you have to work at it.

That's the price most people won't pay. They won't eat right, exercise enough or put forth the effort to adjust their habits to improve their health. Instead, they choose to support an industry of quackery.

Two types of people are suckered into buying everything in the health food section at the grocery store. Some people think anything in that aisle must be good for them and can't be fattening. They think they only need to eat this food to be healthy, no matter how many Big Macs they eat on the side or how little they exercise.

These kind of people think they are fit if they eat one salad a week and chew sugarless gum. So they load their grocery carts with cans of fruit labeled "Diet Delite," and packages of "All Natural Chocolate Crunchee Snax" and ignore the inflated prices and lists of ingredients that look like the glossary of a chemistry book.

The second type of people genuinely are concerned with their health. However, they still buy these products because of misleading labels.

A box of granola bars containing chocolate, sugar, brown sugar, corn syrup and fructose is labeled "100 Percent Natural" in fluorescent orange letters. If people only read the front of the package they may believe the product really is natural. Yet, anything that is really natural is not wrapped in cellophane wrappers, boxed and stamped with an expiration date.

Many people in this group probably buy Wheaties because of its American image. The cereal is associated with being strong, healthy and athletic. Mary Lou is on the front of the box. How healthy and patriotic can you get?

Most people probably never have checked the ingredients, the second of which is sugar.

People who buy these products really think they are doing themselves a favor. Wrong. Most health or diet products are the same as or sometimes even worse than their "regular" counterparts two aisles over. The difference? They are labeled differently and cost more.

For instance, I compared a can of

Featherweight pears with the store's regular brand. The Featherweight ones were packed in natural pear juices. So were the store's name-brand pears. The Featherweight pears had 60 calories per serving. The store's had 50 calories per serving. The Featherweight brand was \$1.26 for 15-ounces and the other brand cost 88 cents.

Then there are diet desserts. I can't figure out who these are made for. If people are sincerely health-conscious they wouldn't eat this stuff anyway. If you really have a sweet tooth and are trying to satisfy a craving, you might as well have the real thing.

Maybe products like "Diet Chocolate Mousse" are made for people who need some justification for eating eight servings of dessert. They don't have to feel guilty if the package says "diet," no matter what it contains.

If the health food aisle is the wrong place to shop, where should you be? Simple. The produce aisle. These are natural products; they just don't have it stamped all over them.

My advice for a healthy diet is to buy

about 80 percent of your groceries in the produce section. With such a wide variety, you're sure to find something you like and it's all good for you. Split the other 20 percent of your shopping between the meat case and the dairy section. I think you'd be surprised at the wide variety of foods you can get, and you'll certainly have a healthier diet than if you bought a lot of boxed and canned "health" foods.

This shopping system can work for anyone in any living situation. If you're always in a hurry and hate to cook, or if you live in the residence halls but don't want to eat the food there, lots of fresh fruit and cheeses would be great for you. If you're a galloping gourmet, then you should buy lots of vegetables and whip up some Chinese cuisine in your wok.

We live in such a convenience-oriented society that ordering a burger and fries at a drive-through is too easy. But it's just as easy to go to the store once a week and wheel a cart down the produce aisle. You just have to change your way of thinking and plan ahead.

Calorie-free drink is vital

With the humidity recently nearing 100 percent, it's hard to believe that one of the most important elements that your body needs is water.

I would guess that all runners, people who simply run for fun and those who frequently are physically active, have a day of reckoning. For me, it was the day of my first and so far, only five-mile race.

I had been running for what seemed like forever when the mirage of a "designated water station" finally became reality at the 2 1/4-mile mark. I was confused. I needed a swimming pool, but all I got was one lousy cup of water. I poured the water over my head and threw the wadded cup to the side of the street with all the other legitimate litter. Rocky Balboa, eat your heart out.

As I was reminded from my experience, regulating body temperature is one of the essential functions of water. On the average, we need two quarts of water a day to replace the water lost



Sandy Gordon

through continuous skin evaporation, lung respiration and excretion. That amount of water — equivalent to eight glasses of water a day — may sound like a lot, but we not only get water from the fluids we drink and from the

recycled water in our bodies, but from everything we eat. The average Saltine cracker, for example, contains nearly 15 percent water. Cottage cheese has nearly 80 percent and lettuce has 95 percent.

Most of us maintain the balance of water in our bodies by becoming thirsty. However, athletes may neglect to replace the amount of water lost during exercise and may need to schedule frequent water breaks. Of course, the amount of water needed depends on the duration and the level of activity.

As most weight-conscious people know, water contains no calories.

But, water may be retained in the body, resulting in temporary weight gain. Still, if water is substituted for snacks, soft drinks and alcoholic beverages, you probably will lose weight.

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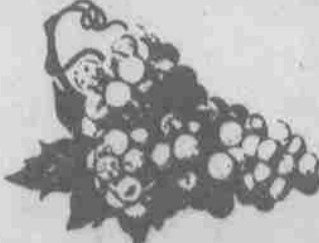
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