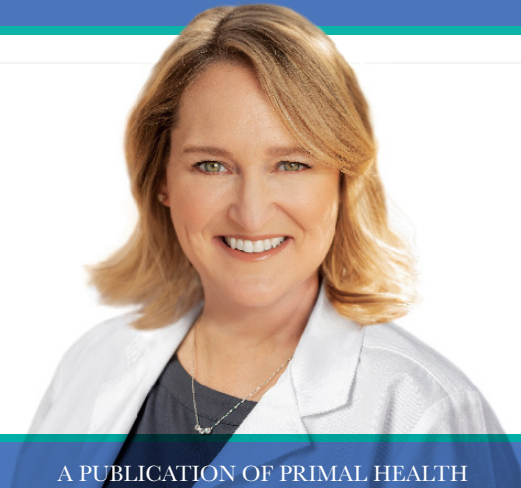


Dr. Marlene's NATURAL HEALTH CONNECTIONS

VOLUME 9 | ISSUE 4:2

A PUBLICATION OF PRIMAL HEALTH



Food Isn't as Simple as It Looks — Part Two

Why “Healthy” Labels Can Be Misleading What the Front of the Package Doesn't Tell You

Last week we talked about something that often gets overlooked in modern nutrition conversations: **why — what food is made out of matters.**



When food remains close to its natural form, digestion tends to happen in a more healthy way. Carbohydrates enter the bloodstream slowly, energy is released steadily, and blood sugar stays relatively stable. But when foods are heavily refined, processed, and reconstructed, digestion can happen much more quickly, which often produces the blood sugar spikes and crashes many people experience during the day.

Once you begin noticing this difference, something interesting tends to happen the next time you walk through the grocery store.

You start realizing that many foods that look perfectly healthy on the outside may not actually be very close to their original form.

And that's where things can become a little weird and confusing.

Most of us make quick decisions about food based on what we see on the front of the package. That's where the attractive images live. It's also where the reassuring language appears — words like natural, whole grain, multi-grain, fortified, or made with real ingredients.



Those phrases sound great, don't they? So wholesome. They suggest the food must be nutritious or close to its natural state.

But remember — the front of the package is designed to sell the product. It doesn't tell you how the food was actually made.

To understand that, you usually have to look somewhere else.

The Bread Aisle Is a Perfect Example

If you want to see how this works in real life, the bread aisle is one of the easiest places to start.

Walk down that aisle and you'll see packages covered with phrases like whole grain, stone ground, multigrain, or made with whole wheat. Many packages show images of golden wheat fields or rustic farms that suggest something traditional and wholesome.

At first glance, it all looks quite healthy.

But the front of the package isn't where the real information is — it's on the back. And even then, that might not be the whole picture, but let's at least start there.

Flip the package over and look at the ingredient list. In many cases, the first ingredient is **refined wheat flour**, followed by sugar, vegetable oils, dough conditioners, preservatives, and stabilizers that allow the bread to stay soft and not mold for long periods of time.

That doesn't necessarily mean that the product is unsafe. But it **DOES** mean the food has been significantly altered from its original form. Maybe think back to if your grandparents ever made bread. Did they add all those other ingredients? No, they sure didn't.

Dr. Marlene's
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But back to you. Once you start refining the flour, and adding all those extra chemicals and ingredients, your body has to deal with all the strangeness of everything **BESIDES** whole grain flour, yeast salt and water. So your food gets processed differently.

Why Refining Grains Changes How Your Body Responds

Let's look at what happens when grains are refined.

Whole grains naturally contain three main components: the bran, the germ, and the starchy interior. The bran provides fiber, the germ contains nutrients and fats, and the starch provides energy.

When grains are milled into refined flour, much of the bran and germ are removed. What remains is mostly starch. Basically, the brown part is removed and only the white remains (they do the same thing with brown rice to make white rice).

Without the fiber and natural structure of the grain, digestive enzymes can break down that starch very quickly. Instead of entering the bloodstream gradually, glucose appears much more rapidly.

That rapid digestion leads to the same pattern we discussed last week: a quick rise in blood sugar followed by the insulin response needed to bring those levels back down.

For the body, that experience of eating refined flour is very different from eating unrefined grains or foods that still contain their natural fiber structure.

Two foods may both be labeled "whole grain," but once you look at what that actually means from a marketing perspective, you can see how we might be unclear about what's what.

Why Marketing Language Can Be Confusing

This is where many people start to feel puzzled about nutrition labels.

Food packaging often includes words that sound meaningful but don't actually tell you very much about how the food was constructed.

For example, the word multigrain simply means more than one type of grain was used. Those grains may still be refined.

Similarly, a product labeled made with whole grains may contain only a small portion of whole grain mixed into a much larger amount of refined flour.

The word natural can also be misleading. It creates the impression that the food is minimally processed, but the term itself doesn't necessarily mean the product is close to its original form. While the word organic actually has standards regulated by the USDA, the word natural does not.

Even the word fortified can create confusion. Fortification means vitamins or minerals were added back to the food after processing removed them. While this can restore certain nutrients, like B vitamins, it doesn't replace all the nutrients that existed in the original grain before it was refined.

Once you begin to understand this pattern, the labels start to make a bit more sense.

You begin to realize that the most useful information about a food is found on the back of the package, not the front.

Putting This Into Practice: Learning to Read the Label That Matters

When people first begin looking more closely at food labels, it can feel like they need to memorize a long list of rules. That's usually not necessary.

In most cases, the most helpful information shows up in just two places: the ingredient list, and the order of those ingredients. Ingredients are listed from the largest amount to the smallest, so the first few ingredients tell you the most about what you're actually eating. If the first ingredient is refined flour or sugar, that gives you a very different picture than if the first ingredient is something like oats, beans, or nuts. It's a simple shift, but it changes how you start looking at food pretty quickly.

Another helpful clue is the length of the ingredient list. Foods that remain closer to their original form tend to have shorter, simpler lists, while foods that have been heavily modified often include stabilizers, emulsifiers, sweeteners, and flavor enhancers to recreate taste and texture. When you see those longer lists, it's often a sign the food has been rebuilt rather than simply prepared.

Butter is still a good example here. Most store-bought butter contains just cream and sometimes salt, so even though it's packaged, it remains very close to its natural form. Compare that with many spreads designed to imitate butter — those often contain refined oils and added ingredients to recreate something that used to occur naturally.

That doesn't mean every packaged food needs to be avoided. But once you start paying attention to how foods are built, you begin to see patterns more clearly, and those patterns tend to make everyday decisions feel much simpler.

Try This Today: A Simple Grocery Store Experiment

Compare Two “Similar” Items

The next time you’re at the grocery store, try a small experiment. Pick two products that seem similar — two types of bread, two cereals, or even two snack foods. At first glance, they may look almost identical, but the differences usually show up once you turn the package around.

Start by looking at the ingredient list. The first ingredient tells you what the food is mostly made of, so that’s always a good place to begin. Then scan the rest of the list. Are the ingredients familiar? Do they look like foods you might recognize from a kitchen, or more like a collection of refined components? Sometimes just seeing those differences side by side is enough to change how you think about the food.

Next, notice how long the list is. A shorter list often means the food has stayed closer to its original form, while a longer list usually means the food has been rebuilt in some way to improve taste, texture, or shelf life. Once you start paying attention to this, you’ll likely begin to notice the same patterns showing up across many different products.

If you want to take it one step further, pay attention to how you feel after eating those foods later that day or the next time you have them. Do you feel steady for a few hours, or does hunger return fairly quickly? Do you feel satisfied, or are you looking for something else not long after? Those small differences can be surprisingly consistent once you start noticing them.

This isn’t about judging the food or trying to be perfect. It’s simply about noticing how different foods behave — both on the label and in your body. Once you start seeing those patterns, the grocery store tends to feel a lot less confusing, and your choices start to feel a bit more straightforward.

What’s Next?

Part Three of Food Isn’t as Simple as It Looks

Next week, we’ll look at one of the most persistent nutrition messages of the past several decades: the idea that fat was the main dietary problem.

For many years, people were encouraged to choose low-fat versions of foods such as milk, yogurt, and other dairy products. But as we’ll see, removing fat from food changed the way the body processed that food in ways few people were ever told about. And once you understand what then happened in the body, the story becomes much more interesting.

About Dr. Marlene

Dr. Marlene Merritt’s passion for natural medicine is fueled by her drive to help others, and her own experience of overcoming a debilitating heart condition, diagnosed at the age of 20. A competitive cross-country cyclist at the time, she suddenly began experiencing severe chest pains. Forced to quit the sport, she suffered from extreme fatigue and constant pain for another 15 years, despite doing everything that conventional, Western medical doctors told her to do.

And then, the tide turned. A physician trained in naturopathic healing recommended a whole-food vitamin E supplement. A week after starting the supplement regimen, her energy began to return, and the pain began to disappear.

Dr. Marlene is a Doctor of Oriental Medicine, has a Master’s in Nutrition, and is an Applied Clinical Nutritionist. She is Board Certified in Bariatric Counseling, and certified in the Bredesen MEND Protocol,TM a groundbreaking method of reversing Alzheimer’s disease. She sees patients at the Merritt Wellness Centers in Austin, Texas, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, trains health practitioners nationwide, and is the author of *Smart Blood Sugar* and *The Blood Pressure Solution*.



Is your memory getting worse?

If you're over 50, chances are your brain isn't functioning like it did in your younger years.

This isn't surprising. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control warns that over 16 million Americans now live with cognitive impairment. This includes not only memory problems, but also difficulty in learning new things, concentrating, and making important decisions.

Unfortunately, age is the greatest risk factor for cognitive impairment. By age 65, 40% of folks in the U.S. have age-associated memory issues. So as the years go by, it wouldn't be unusual for you to forget things. Or notice how difficult it is to stay focused during a conversation or TV program.

But I have good news. It doesn't have to be that way...

Primal Labs is proud to introduce **CogniForce**, a ground-breaking nutritional supplement for optimal brain support.

CogniForce is an easy-to-swallow gel cap containing 10 powerful nutrients to help you improve cognitive function, memory, and brain health:

- ✓ **Ginkgo:** Improves blood flow to the brain. This supports memory, mood, and focus — and exerts a positive effect on the brain's processing speed to help avoid "senior moments."
- ✓ **L-theanine:** This amino acid stimulates brain neurotransmitters to boost concentration and mood — and promote relaxation.
- ✓ **Acetyl-L-carnitine:** Research shows this amino acid can significantly improve memory and focus — and lift you out of those occasional "blue moods."
- ✓ **The B vitamins riboflavin, vitamin B6, folate, and B12:** Studies show these crucial vitamins help prevent the brain shrinkage many people experience as they grow older.
- ✓ **Sensoril®:** This patented extract of the ancient Ayurvedic herb ashwagandha helps lower cortisol — the stress hormone.

- ✓ **L-tyrosine:** Another amino acid crucial for production of brain neurotransmitters involved in memory and cognition.
- ✓ **Bioperine®:** Patented extract of black pepper fruit helps improve absorption of nutrients.

Today, people from all walks of life are protecting their brains with **CogniForce**. Here's what a few of them had to say:

"I have been taking **CogniForce** for about 5 weeks now. I noticed a positive result fairly early. I am feeling more alert and better able to handle tedious work that used to overwhelm me."

— Lee Miller from Austin, TX

"I started taking **CogniForce** fifty-two days ago, and my own forgetfulness has slowed down."

— Hayley Burns from Richmond, VA

"I've been taking **CogniForce** just a little over a month now, and it has helped me improve my thinking and mood swings."

— Barbara Sherwood from Leesburg, FL

If you want to maintain your memory and protect your brain into your 60s, 70s, 80s and beyond... the time to do it is NOW. Join thousands of satisfied users experiencing the brain-boosting effects of **CogniForce**.

We're so confident in the brain and memory-supporting power of **CogniForce**; we offer a 60-day **RISK-FREE** 100% money-back guarantee. You have nothing to lose.

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Q&A

Q: Should I just expect memory loss as a normal part of aging? — Carol M.

A: Some slowing of recall can occur with age, but significant cognitive decline is not inevitable. The brain remains highly adaptable throughout life and is strongly influenced by overall metabolic health — particularly insulin sensitivity, inflammation, sleep quality, and vascular function.

Insulin plays an important role in how brain cells use energy. When insulin resistance develops, that signaling becomes less efficient, and brain cells may not receive or use fuel as effectively. Over time, this can affect memory, focus, and processing speed.

Inflammation and reduced blood flow to the brain can also contribute. The brain depends on steady oxygen and nutrient delivery, so anything that impacts circulation — including cardiovascular health — can influence cognitive function. Chronic stress can further amplify these effects by increasing inflammatory signaling.

The encouraging part is that many of these factors are modifiable. Supporting blood sugar stability, exercising regularly, maintaining muscle mass, challenging the brain, and prioritizing sleep all help protect cognitive function. Aging itself isn't the sole cause of memory loss. In many cases, it's the accumulation of lifestyle factors over time — and those are areas where meaningful improvements can still be made.

Q: Is coffee bad for blood sugar? — Dan P.

A: For most people, moderate coffee consumption is not harmful and may even offer some benefits. Coffee contains polyphenols — plant compounds that support antioxidant activity and may help improve insulin sensitivity over time.

That said, caffeine can affect individuals differently. In some people, it temporarily raises cortisol, which can lead to a short-term increase in blood sugar. This effect tends to be more noticeable in those who are already sensitive to caffeine, under higher stress, or dealing with existing blood sugar instability.

Timing can also play a role. Drinking coffee on an empty stomach — especially first thing in the morning — may amplify that cortisol response and lead to more noticeable blood sugar fluctuations or jittery energy. Pairing coffee with food often helps reduce that effect.

Another factor is how coffee affects appetite. For some people, it suppresses hunger early in the day, which can lead to under-eating and then stronger cravings later on. That pattern can contribute to blood sugar swings over the course of the day.

The bigger concern, however, is often what's added to the coffee. Sweetened creamers, flavored syrups, and sugar can significantly raise insulin levels and contribute to energy crashes later.

If you tolerate coffee well and keep it simple — such as black or with minimal additives — it can fit into a healthy metabolic plan. The key is paying attention to how your body responds and adjusting accordingly. Small adjustments can make a noticeable difference.

Q: Should I take probiotics every day? — Kevin S.

A: Not necessarily. Probiotics are strain-specific and condition-specific, so their effects vary depending on the individual. Some people benefit from daily use, especially after antibiotic exposure or during digestive disruption. Others may not need them consistently.

In some cases, probiotics can worsen symptoms like bloating or discomfort — particularly if the underlying issue involves bacterial overgrowth or gut inflammation. In those situations, adding more bacteria without addressing the root cause may not be helpful.

Supporting the microbiome through fiber-rich vegetables, fermented foods when tolerated, and stable blood sugar regulation often provides broader benefits. These approaches help create a healthier environment for beneficial bacteria to thrive.

Probiotics are one tool — not a universal requirement — and tend to work best when used thoughtfully rather than automatically.

Do you have a question for Dr. Marlene?

Send your health-related questions to drmarlene@naturalhealthconnections.com. Please include your first name and the initial of your last name. Although she cannot answer each question directly, Dr. Marlene will select a few in each newsletter and will address other questions and concerns in articles in future issues. Answers are intended for educational purposes only and should not be viewed as medical advice. If you need help with your subscription or have questions about Primal Health supplements, email support@primalhealthlp.com or call 877-300-7849.