

giving up GMOs—for good

I have never liked the idea of eating something that has been genetically modified, but it wasn't until reading Melissa Diane Smith's new book *Going Against GMOs*, that I really started to understand just how harmful these so-called " Frankenfoods " really are. Up until that point, I didn't understand what genetically modified organisms (GMOs) were—or why I should avoid them.

"When I sifted through the hype and really studied the evidence, I realized there was no good reason for consumers to eat GMOs," says Smith, who immersed herself in the world of genetic engineering by interviewing experts, attending conferences, studying non-GMO foods, and doing extensive research. "As a journalist, I saw this as a very big story, but I thought it wasn't being covered in a way that Americans needed to hear or could understand."

Smith's book opens with the incredible story of a client whose health was transformed after adopting a non-GMO diet: within a year of changing her food, this client experienced relief from chronic seasonal allergies. In fact, she was able to stop taking allergy medications. Her body felt less inflamed; joint pain subsided, and her asthma symptoms improved dramatically; and perhaps most impressive, blood tests showed that the woman's systemic immune condition had normalized for the first time in years.

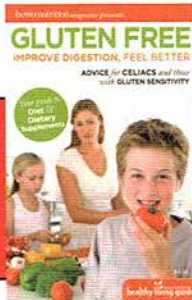
The American Academy of Environmental Medicine lists the following conditions as serious health risks associated with GM foods, says Smith in her book:

- ▶ Infertility
- ▶ Immune system problems
- ▶ Accelerated aging
- ▶ Disruption of insulin and cholesterol regulation
- ▶ Gastrointestinal problems
- ▶ Changes in the liver, spleen, and gastrointestinal tract

The good news is that, with a little knowledge, you can steer clear of GMOs. Smith, who is a nutritionist and regular contributor to *Better Nutrition* (see "Food Matters," p. 66), helps demystify GMOs and provides practical solutions for avoiding them when shopping for food or dining out. See p. 52 for our Q&A with Smith, "Going Against GMOs."

Nicole

nbrechka@aimmedia.com



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Contributing Writers Jeannette Bessinger, CHHC, Jonny Bowden, PhD, CNS, Jack Challem, BA, ASN, Emily A. Kane, ND, LAC, Marita Schauch, BSc, ND, Melissa Diane Smith, Lisa Turner, Neil Zevnik

Production Director Cynthia Lyons
Production Manager Mark Stokes

Business & Editorial Offices 300 N. Continental Blvd., Ste. 650
 El Segundo, CA 90245
 310-356-4100
 Fax: 310-356-4110

Vice President, General Manager Kim Paulsen
 kpaulsen@aimmedia.com

Group Publisher Joanna Shaw
 800-443-4974, ext. 708

Associate Publisher Bernadette Higgins
 561-362-3955

Midwest Ad Manager Lisa Dodson
 800-443-4974, ext. 703

West Coast and Mountain Ad Manager Cindy Schofield
 310-456-5997

Retail Development Group 142 Butterfly Lane
 Louisville, KY 40229
 800-443-4974, ext. 703
 Fax: 317-536-3708

Director, Retail Development and Custom Marketing John Potter
 800-443-4974, ext. 702
 jpotter@aimmedia.com

National Sales Representative Jamie L. Trevillyan
 800-443-4974, ext. 701
 jtrevillyan@aimmedia.com

Business Development Kim Erickson
 702-219-6188

Digital Advertising Operations Manager Ron Goldy
 rgoldy@aimmedia.com

Accounting & Billing Yolanda Campanatto
 310-356-2248

Advertising & Retail Sales Coordinator Mary Brahim
 310-356-2272



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Q&A
with author
**Melissa
Diane Smith**

GOING AGAINST

October is Non-GMO Month a perfect time to interview our Food Matters columnist
Melissa Diane Smith, author of the new book *Going Against GMOs: The Fast-Growing Movement
to Avoid Unnatural Genetically Modified "Foods" to Take Back Our Food and Health*





GMOs

Why did you decide to write your new book?

I felt there was a strong need for an easy-to-understand consumer's guide on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in our food. The book covers basics most consumers have missed and offers practical information on how to avoid GM foods, including shopping and eating out advice and more than 45 recipes.

What are GMOs and why do we need to “go against” them?

GMOs are created using genetic engineering techniques. Engineers insert genes from one living thing—say, a bacterium—into the DNA of another living thing—say, a type of corn—to confer new traits, such as pesticide production in a crop.

The FDA doesn't conduct safety studies on GM foods; it leaves that up to the companies that make them. But animal research points to serious health risks from eating GM foods, including infertility, immune system problems, gastrointestinal problems, organ changes, and tumors.

Plus, GMOs threaten our environment, food security, and agricultural system. Most genetically modified crops on the market are sprayed with large amounts of herbicide, which pollute our land and water and get into our food. Chemical companies have been purchasing more of the world's seeds, genetically modifying them, and patenting them, so a handful of companies control our seed and food supply—and farmers can no longer save and pass down those patented seeds.

There are many health, environmental, farmers' rights, and food security reasons to avoid GMOs. Perhaps tops on the list are that GM foods benefit the chemical companies that make them, not us, and the only reason most of us have been eating them is because we didn't know we were!

What are the main challenges of going against GMOs?

Well, GMOs are everywhere—in all stores, all restaurants, and in all diets. To avoid them, you have to go against what most people are eating, which can be uncomfortable and overwhelming at first. It takes time to change buying and eating habits.

GMO

HOW TO AVOID GMOs

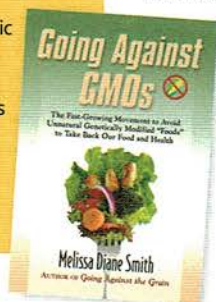
Avoid these food sources of GMOs unless they are labeled organic or verified non-GMO. The nine GM crops that are commercialized and now in our foods are:

- ▶ **CORN** (as in corn oil, cornmeal, cornstarch, corn syrup, hominy, polenta, and other corn-based ingredients)
- ▶ **CANOLA** (as in canola oil)
- ▶ **COTTONSEED** (as in cottonseed oil)
- ▶ **SUGAR BEETS** ("sugar" in ingredient lists is almost certainly a combination of sugar from both sugar cane and GM sugar beets, also found in foods that contain beet sugar)
- ▶ **SOYBEANS** (as in soybean oil, soy protein, soy lecithin, soy milk, tofu, and other soy-based ingredients)
- ▶ **ALFALFA**, which is fed to livestock
- ▶ **PAPAYA** (from Hawaii and China)
- ▶ **YELLOW SQUASH AND ZUCCHINI** (look for those labeled organic or grown from non-GMO seed)

Also stay away from two additional direct GM products added to foods:

- ▶ **ASPARTAME** (in diet soda and NutraSweet artificial sweetener)
- ▶ **rBGH** (recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone, also known as Bovine Somatotropin or bST.) It was developed from genetically engineered *E. coli* bacteria and is injected into some cows to increase milk production. Look for dairy products labeled rBGH-free—also known as bST-free—or better yet, for milk products labeled organic.

Melissa Diane Smith began learning about the dangers of GMOs in 2000, when Star-Link corn (a type of GM corn) accidentally entered the U.S. food supply and was recalled. "I was concerned—horrified, really," says Smith, who has since become a non-GMO lecturer and educator. "As a nutritionist, health journalist, and concerned citizen, I couldn't really sit on this information. I began writing about the topic on my blog and speaking about it in my community," she says. Her new book, *Going Against GMOs*, is available on Amazon and through goingagainstgmos.com. Smith counsels clients across the nation from her home in Tucson, Ariz.



Understand that it's a process, so be patient with the time it takes to learn how to be a savvy non-GMO shopper. Two important strategies are to continually remind yourself why you're avoiding GMOs, and to plan ahead by having non-GMO foods easily available and ready to eat when you're at home or on the road. Following the Eat GMO-Free Challenge in the book—a tip to try each day for a month—is a great way to learn gradually.

Tell us about your approach to a GMO-free diet.

It's really the same approach I emphasized in my first book, *Going Against the Grain*—focus on non-starchy vegetables and, to a lesser extent, fruits in place of processed convenience foods such as bread, crackers, and cereals. That's the best way to avoid the most common sources of GMOs—corn; soy; sugar; canola oil; and cottonseed oil.

As of right now, there are only four produce items that may be genetically modified—sweet corn, zucchini, yellow squash, and papaya from Hawaii and China. Avoid those foods or seek out organic or non-GMO versions. Any other produce items you buy are naturally non-GMO. Loading up on vegetables is protective of health! According to one recent study, each daily portion of fresh vegetables we eat reduces the overall risk of death by 16 percent.

What are the best ways to avoid GMOs?

At the grocery store, shop mostly on the outer edges, where the fresh produce, meats, and less-processed foods tend to be displayed. Stay away from packaged foods as much as possible, and avoid vegetable oils such as soybean and canola oils.

When you do buy processed foods, first look for a Non-GMO Project Verified label, which means the item has completed a rigorous review process by the Non-GMO Project. The process includes testing of at-risk ingredients.

To be labeled USDA Organic, a product must be produced

without the use of GMOs, as well as without irradiation, sewage sludge, antibiotics, growth hormones, and synthetic chemical fertilizers. However, some GM crops, such as corn, can spread through wind drift and contaminate organic crops, and organic certification does not require specific testing for GMOs.

Therefore, for the most protection, choose products that feature both the Non-GMO Project Verified label and the USDA Organic label—or just avoid foods made with the 11 direct sources of GMOs. (Editor's note: see sidebar at left.) For fresh meat, seek out wild-caught fish, organic or Non-GMO Project Verified poultry, and organic, 100% grass-fed beef.

What about avoiding GMOs at restaurants?

When eating out, understand that Mexican cuisine based on corn and Asian cuisine based on soy tend to be problematic for avoiding GMOs, whereas Greek, Italian, and Middle Eastern restaurants that use 100% olive oil are much better bets for getting non-GMO meals. Also, know that most restaurants routinely use GM vegetable oils. A good first question to ask is: What kind of oil do you cook with and use in your salad dressings? The answer that you're looking for is 100% pure olive oil.

What else can we do as consumers to support the Non-GMO movement?

Take action in ways that resonate most with you. Consider donating to non-profit, non-GMO groups. Grow your own food, even if it's just herbs on your windowsill. Get involved in targeted boycott and petition campaigns, and work with others to enact local GMO bans as several West Coast counties have done. Another powerful strategy is to ask your financial advisor to sell any mutual funds that own large volumes of stock from major biotech firms—the companies behind GMOs.

These actions contribute to a fast-growing movement of consumer awareness that can kick GMOs out of the food supply and create a healthier food system.