



**SOUL food**

simply: health coaching  
© 2018 Elizabeth A. Baker, LLC

# SOUL food

Coaching clients in identifying what foods serve them best is an important part of my work as a health coach. After all, we are what we eat: what we ingest literally becomes our bones, muscles, blood, *etc.* I don't recommend a specific style of eating (Paleo, Vegan, Omnivore, *etc.*) other than encouraging you to eat whole foods—those that are as close to nature as you can find. The "next level" version of a whole foods diet is a **SOLE foods** diet, one which focuses on foods that are Seasonal, Organic, Local, and Ethical. And if you're thinking, "But that's so expensive..." you can read all about **getting your nickel's worth** on my blog. I also cover that topic in detail in my book, *Flip Your Kitchen*.



The foods we put in our mouths are actually "secondary foods." "Primary foods" are all the other parts of our lives that nourish us—or don't! Think: career, physical activity, spiritual practice, sleep, time in nature.... I consider the "next level" of our primary foods choices to be **SOUL foods**, those which are Seasonal, Organic, Unique, and Loving.

# seasonal

It's pretty obvious that the food and lifestyle choices that suited us as babies, toddlers, kids, teenagers, young adults, and middle-aged and older adults don't usually remain the same: often, we shift them without much thought. As older adults, we sometimes notice that we're packing on pounds, we aren't able to eat as much as before, or that even a single glass of wine in the evening can wreak havoc on our sleep at night.

If we are prone to looking for external "fixes," we are likely to run toward adding any number of silver bullets when something is "wrong" with our bodies / minds / spirits: crazy diets and detoxes, supplements and smoothies, workouts and woo. But if we pause and consider that perhaps we're just entering another stage of life, we may discover that what feels better is simply shifting our current food and lifestyle choices without adding new things to the mix.



In Integrative Nutrition®, the style of health coaching that I practice, the theory of bio-individuality holds that the food and lifestyle choices that work for one person may be toxic to another. There's a corollary to that theorem: the primary and secondary foods that nourished us in one season of our life don't necessarily nurture us in another season.

Sometimes, however, we may resist change: we cling to the foods that no longer serve us because in a previous season, they were "perfect." In my own life, I've experienced this primarily in my food and exercise choices: I was a vegetarian for many years and even dabbled with being a vegan (yeah, I love cheese too much for that to happen!) But after moving in with a serious carnivore and being faced with the prospect of cooking two meals for every one mealtime, I gradually switched (kicking and screaming) to eating more animal products—and discovered that this shift did wonders for my thyroid troubles.

# seasonal



I was never an athletic child—I was overjoyed to discover that I could fulfill my phys ed requirement in college by continuing my horseback riding lessons rather than taking up a more demanding club or team sport—but then I discovered how good it feels to be more physically active and from my later 20s into my late 40s was pretty much addicted to high-intensity workouts.

When I hit 50, I suddenly realized I could no longer sustain those workouts, which felt devastating: I worried I'd gain weight and suffer from all the issues that come with that. But my body just said no in message after message until I finally heard it. In the past two years, I've moved from lots of high intensity aerobics and weight training to walking and yoga and some gentle body-weight resistance training.

And my reward for listening came when I had my annual physical at 52 and the resident told me that had he not seen my birth date, my numbers would have indicated I was 26.

The takeaway? Cultivating more awareness of the life season in which we find ourselves and being more intentional about the seasonality of our lifestyle choices come with their own rewards; reflecting on the times we resisted the change of seasons shows us that clinging to practices, even (especially?) those that are perfect for us for a time, can actually be counterproductive.



# your turn | seasonal

In what season do you find yourself?

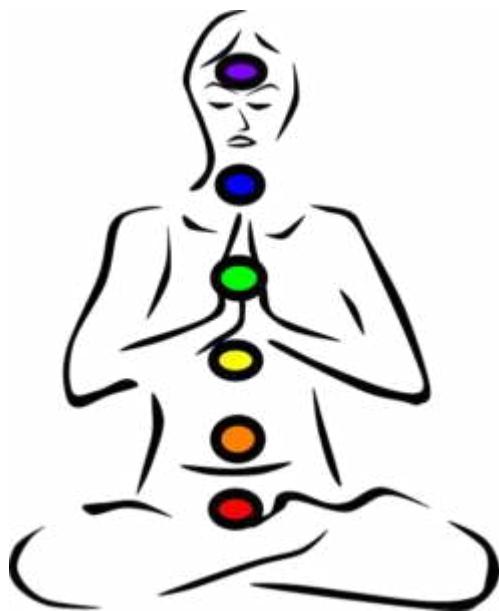
What shifts in your primary foods are your body / mind / spirit asking you to make to accommodate this new stage and thrive in it?

# organic

"Organic" has a lot of meanings: perhaps the most familiar in today's world is its reference to foods grown without synthetic inputs (that's right, organic farmers can use pesticides and herbicides, but they cannot be synthetically derived) using farming methods that integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices to foster re/cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity.



On a more general level, "organic" can mean: fundamental or basic, forming an integral element of the whole, organized in the sense of having a systematic coordination of parts. This definition speaks to our primary foods—everything that nourishes us (or doesn't) besides what we put in our mouths: we are complex beings made up of many parts, pieces, and systems, both internal and external.



On a physical level, organic SOUL food involves treating our bodies as a whole, much the way traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurveda do when compared to the conventional Western medicine model. The latter reduces our systems to specialties (doctors treat ears/nose/throat, bones, kidneys, livers, hearts, lungs...) while the former looks at the whole to see what systems may be out of balance.

# organic

Just to be clear: I believe that Western medicine has a place at the table—it excels in treating urgent/emergent conditions ... and it's not so much health care as it is sick care. It is curative rather than preventative.

If we consider ourselves to have a systematic coordination of parts, then all of these parts must be optimally nourished to function at peak performance level. So what does it mean to nourish ourselves organically on a SOUL food level?



I like to compare it to eating **organic SOLE food**: the choices we make can either nourish us, conserve the environment, and grow the local economy ... or they can ruin our health, toxify the environment, and destroy the local economy.

We face choices in our primary foods almost on a minute-to-minute basis: to go to sleep or stay up bingewatching Netflix? to answer one more email or spend time with the kids? to sleep in or work out? to pay more for ethically-made clothes or save money on those made in a sweatshop? to spend money on disposable "stuff" or on meaningful experiences? *etc.*

I feel that when I make better choices, I am more in tune with the Universe, I vibrate at a higher frequency and do more good in the world. (This is the point at which my kids start rolling their eyes and muttering under their breath about "the woo-woo part of the program.")

Whether you subscribe to the woo or prefer to consider the more practical side, being more mindful about the effects our choices have on our own system and on our part in the larger system can bring some intention to our decisions—and it feels to me like our own lives and our world could use a little more intention and attention than they're getting from us these days....

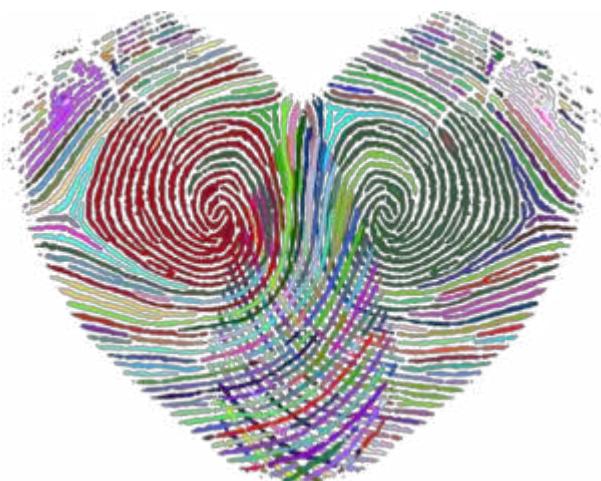
# your turn | organic

What are some choices have you faced recently about "eating organically" on the primary food level?

How will you commit to "eating organically" on the primary food level?

# unique

Integrative Nutrition® upholds that we are all bio-individual: what is food for me might be poison for you; what nourishes me might toxify you. This is true not only for the food we put in our mouths but for all the primary foods that nourish us (or don't), and that's where "unique," the U of SOUL food comes in.



Have you ever noticed that some people can't function unless they sleep 10 hours a night while others thrive on 7–8 hours?

(Nope, I am not going there: if you get less than 7 and think you're doing just fine, try getting 7 for several nights in a row before you come at me—science is on my side on this one. For a great exploration of the topic of sleep and how to get it, check out Dr. Michael Breus, "[The Sleep Doctor](#)," on [Healthy View Radio](#): banana peel tea, anyone?)

And this is true in most areas of our lives. Some people love HIIT workouts, others prefer gentle yoga—and both can be in excellent physical shape. Some adore the hustle and bustle of big cities, others prefer the quiet countryside. Some are jazzed by a fast-paced work environment with plenty of colleagues, others prefer to work alone from home. Some love worshiping in a community of faith, others prefer a solitary spiritual practice. Some love a relationship that involves a lot of physical touch, others prefer to hear words of acknowledgment. *Etc.*

It seems there is no "right" answer to how we "should" live: we are indeed unique.

But a lot of us look for the answers outside ourselves, and our parents, our colleagues, our friends, our children, the media, and even the government are all happy to tell us how to live. Gurus and experts abound. It's easier to look outside ourselves because we are then spared the hard work of experimenting and finding our own answers, our own way of nourishing ourselves.

# unique

Many New Year's resolutions fail precisely for these two reasons: first, we try to impose external standards on our unique lives, and second, we give ourselves insufficient time to make shifts in our primary food areas.

There is a danger in embracing our uniqueness a bit too much: we may begin to feel that not only our strengths but our struggles are unique, and that can feel isolating. In an odd way this reminds me of the meme "Introverts unite—separately in your own home." I often find myself telling clients, "I want to say this as gently as I can: you are unique ... and that doesn't make you special!"



Perhaps one way to view this paradox is that, although our journeys are all different, we share the same goal: to nourish ourselves to the highest degree possible so we can live our best lives, however we define that as unique individuals.

One exercise that helps us to start nourishing ourselves more mindfully in the area of primary foods is to notice how often we hear the words "I should" cross our lips (or even our thoughts). Whose "should" is it—does it come from listening to your own body's requests, or is it coming from an external source?

And of course, the reverse is true, too: how often do we say or think the words "You should..." when we are talking to others? And yes, as a health coach, it's a fine line to walk, learning to say, "I wonder what would happen if you..." rather than "I think you should...!"

# your turn | unique

Think about the last time you said or thought, "I should...." Can you identify whether it's an internal pulling energy to do something or an external pushing or yanking energy? How did it feel to do it ... or not do it?

Think about the last time you told someone "You should...." Were you encouraging the person to follow his/her intuition or gut feeling? Or were you urging them to do something because *you* found it worked *for you*?

Think about the last time someone told you, "You should...." How did it feel to do it ... or not do what they suggested?

# loving



Relationships are one of the most important primary foods in our lives, and we rarely (if ever) think about our relationship with ourselves as one of them—and so it is perhaps the one we rarely tend to.

I'm a podcast junkie, and one of my very favorite ones is [Over it and On with it](#) with a coach named Christine Hassler (although I'll admit that the capitalization of that title gives me fits—no version ever seems correct).

Hassler points out that our ideas about love are most often rooted in our relationship with our parents: we may grow up thinking that love means showering someone with material gifts ... or hugs and kisses; it may mean being strict or being permissive; it may mean impossible-to-achieve standards or effusive praise for fairly insignificant accomplishments.

Whatever it looks like, we often perversely desire something else from our parents, and yet as we grow up, we carry that learned idea of what love looks like with us, often filling our lives with friends and lovers and spouses who treat us the same way, even if on the surface, they seem to be our parents' opposites. And we look to others to complete ourselves.



Hassler frequently says that every relationship in our lives is there to teach us something *about ourselves*, and only when we learn that lesson are we free to move on—either taking the relationship to a higher plane or releasing it if it no longer serves us. (One of my favorite lines from her is in reference to her former marriage: "It didn't fail; it had an expiration date!")

# loving

Once we can give ourselves what we really desired as children (soothing words? a feeling of safety? an occasional material gift? quality time?), we can get “over it and on with it.”

A practice that Christine often recommends is to take a picture of ourselves as a child and reassure that child that s/he is loved/safe/etc. That may sound hokey, but let me ask you: what are the first words that pop into your head when you see yourself in the mirror? Are they, “I look wonderful today,” or are they, “When did I get so old/fat/gray...?” Are they, “I am killing it in my life,” or are they, “Why can’t I ever get anything right in my life?”

And really, if you don’t hear, “You’re so beautiful, you’re amazing, I love you so much” on a regular basis from others in your life, maybe it’s because you don’t believe these things or say them to yourself? And if you don’t, is it any wonder you don’t consider yourself worthy of the best self-care?

As with secondary foods, we are all bio-individual in our primary foods as well: what is self-loving for one doesn’t necessarily work for another. It takes time to discover what is really loving self-care, whether it’s in the realm of relationships (with ourselves and with others), career, spiritual practice, physical activity, sleep, time outside in Nature....



Discovering truly loving primary food also requires that we have a sense of what our most deeply held principles and priorities are: asking ourselves at every turn whether the choice we’re making is in alignment with those principles is the way to finding that perfectly nourished lifestyle—one that is “right” for us ... and doesn’t keep others from living their own best life.

# your turn | loving

What would it sound like to speak to yourself in a loving fashion?

What would it feel, taste, smell, look to be truly loving to youself?

How could you show yourself a little love today ... and every day?

And finally, what's stopping you from discovering and nourishing yourself with SOUL primary foods?

# an invitation

## **Tell me YOURstory.**

It's like history ... but yours.

We'll talk about you and your SOUL foods,  
we'll cover what supports you and what gets in your way,  
and we'll take a look at how your integrative health  
can establish a solid foundation for your dream life.

**Claim your FREE consultation**

