

THE FUTURE OF HEALTH | NOW 2012

Chad Sarno

Super Healing Foods from Whole Foods Market's Senior Chef

*The following is taken from **The Future of Health Now** interview conducted by Ann Wixon with master chef Chad Sarno, Senior Culinary Educator and Research & Development Chef for Whole Food Market's Health Starts Here Program. Mr. Sarno has been bringing his approach to healthy cuisine to some of the world's premiere plant-based restaurants, resorts, film sets, and healing centers, globally, for well over a decade.*

We have compiled the best, most valuable and easily applicable content from this amazing interview so you can begin to implement positive changes today, as you strive to live a happier and healthier life now and in the future.

Who is Chad Sarno?



In 2005, I partnered with a boutique international lifestyle company, based in Central Europe, as executive chef and concept developer to launch the acclaimed SAF restaurant brand – an exciting fine dining, green gastronomy concept, highlighting health supportive cuisine, and organic wine bars – and successfully launched six restaurants in Istanbul, Munich, and London.

In 2009, I joined Whole Foods Market to create, coordinate, and launch a company-wide healthy eating initiative, called Health Starts Here. I am currently supporting the roll-out as global program coordinator, research and development chef, employee immersion programs coordinator, and culinary educator.

In addition, I am director and founder of Vital Creations, which is also rawchef.com, specializing in restaurant and spa consultation, culinary education, retail research and development, and working with chefs and restaurateurs alike to increase their health supportive and health promoting menu offerings.

What is Health Starts Here?

Whole Foods Market has a mission statement, which is broken up into core values. They just added a seventh core value, which is promoting the health of our stakeholders through healthy eating education.

Health Starts Here is an initiative that is a translation of that new seventh core value, and we've been rolling it out internally with team members for a little over a year now, doing a number of health and wellness programs to encourage team members to start cooking more, to start looking at their diets, and knowing their personal numbers... and just embracing wellness more.

In January 2011, we just launched the public Health Starts Here program.

Basically, Health Starts Here is a simple, mindful approach to healthy eating that's rooted in four simple ways to build a better, delicious meal:

- Whole food
- Plant-strong
- Nutrient-dense
- Healthy fats

Like the older store models, there will be an "info desk" (similar to customer service) where you can walk up with kale and say, "How do I cook this? What is it? What are the health benefits of it? Can you tell me a couple ways that I can incorporate it into my diet?" That kind of got lost over the years, and just sort of dissolved that area. We're kind of going back to that.

We will have healthy eating specialists in every store. The main focus of their role is to help guide customers to the healthiest options we sell, and almost be a cooking coach, walking around with them. "What's quinoa all about?" "How do you cook it?"

It's really just a health cooking coach that can walk around the store with you, and answer any questions, do store tours, and do store demos. It's really about offering education.

The Truth about Eating Healthy

The two largest misperceptions of eating healthy are that it is expensive and will taste "boring."

The Health Starts Here program guides shoppers, to the healthiest options as well as the most affordable, such as the bulk department, the produce department, and so forth.

In terms of boring or tasting poorly, healthy eating is far from that. It's all about building flavors.

But at the end of the day, you have to meet people where they're at. You can't just meet somebody with a green juice, and say, "Hey, start eating healthy."

You have to ask, "So, what do you like? Do you like pizza? You like lasagna?" You have to take your favorites, and just make them healthier.

And talk about variety! If you look at the standard American diet, it's about 70% processed food. In terms of the variety of fruits and vegetables— and this is a statistic— the average American only eats about 19 different fruits and vegetables in their lifetime.

This is crazy when you consider that there are more than 800 varieties of beans that are amazing. There are 30 varieties of lentils and 12 types of kale. It just goes on and on.

Think of it as a celebration of food, rather than a deprivation.

Kitchen Necessities

A lot of people think you have to get all this fancy equipment to actually start eating healthy. It's really affordable, once you start. Here are the basics:

- A good knife
 - Needs to be sharp (dull knives are dangerous)
 - Whether choose a heavy, German or French knife (like Henkel or Wusthof) or a lighter Japanese-influenced knife (like Max or Global), you need to be *comfortable* with it.
- Cutting board
- Blender
 - Can go basic
 - High-speed is best
 - Like Vitamix
- Cookware
 - Avoid aluminum
 - Cast iron is best
- Bake ware
- Steamer
 - Can be collapsible steamer basket
 - Bamboo steamer
- Juicer
- Slow cooker/crock pot
- See Outfitting Your Kitchen handout

Understanding the Four Pillars

The four pillars are the core of the Whole Foods' Health Starts Here program. The four pillars are:

- Whole foods
- Plant-strong
- Healthy fats
- Nutrient-dense

Whole foods are single ingredients: for example, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans, grains, seafood, meats, etc. Nothing has been added to it and nothing has been taken away from it, either. They are minimally processed foods. Nothing is extruded, extracted or isolated in any way.

Plant-strong is all about reconfiguring the plate. Picture one of those old cafeteria plates, with the larger section and the two small sections. Most people have animal products being the center of the plate. Instead, make plants the main event. Everybody can stand to eat more plants.

When I talk of plants, I'm talking dry plants and fresh plants. Beans fall into that category. Grains fall into that category. Nuts and seeds fall into that category. Lots of fresh, frozen, dry vegetables fall into that category. It's all about including more plants, no matter what you eat.

Healthy fats also fall within the whole food category. Fat, in the right form, is very healthy for us. If you're going to choose to eat fats, eat them in their whole plant form. Minimize extracted oils and processed fats, and just include whole food fats such as nuts, seeds, avocados, olives, coconut, and so forth.

With **nutrient-dense**, we're talking about micronutrients. Macronutrients are what we're most familiar with; the proteins, fats, and carbs. Those are the most common macronutrients. They happen to be *calorie* dense as well. Micronutrients, on the other hand, are the phytonutrients, vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals. They are also calorie free.

To help you identify nutrient-dense foods, Whole Foods has developed the Aggregate Nutrient Density Index, or ANDI score. It's a food scoring system that compares the micronutrients per calorie. Foods are scored from 1 to 1,000.

For example, a typical salad is made of iceberg lettuce. On the ANDI score, iceberg lettuce falls at about 120, 123, something like that. If you want to just bump up your nutrient level, your micronutrients, then go for the darker greens like kale or collards or bokchoi. Those are 1,000 on the ANDI score.

The point is to make every bite count.

What is the 28-Day Challenge?

The 28 day challenge encourages customers to make healthy changes such as eliminating processed food, eliminating dairy, eliminating meat, choosing just dark greens, doing more exercise, etc., and incorporating these into their lives.

We're helping them track the results. We have support groups, supper clubs, and daily trainings and emails going out from a healthy eating specialist to get customers involved.

We have seen unbelievable results, and it's all about just incorporating more plants. You can buy every nutrition book out there, you can listen to every nutrition-focused doctor out there, and at the end of the day, they say the same thing: It's all about incorporating more plants.

What is the Total Health Immersion Program?

Total health immersion programs are health and wellness programs offered by Whole Foods to their team members. They work with three amazing doctors that sit on the medical advisory board. Team members have to apply for the program.

They've determined what determines a high risk, as a team member, things like cholesterol numbers, BMI numbers, blood pressure, and so forth. If they're accepted, they get the choice of three different programs and three different, amazing doctors, in three different parts of the country.

Whole Foods pays 100% for the team members to go to these programs. They cover airfare and everything.

A lot of people think, "Oh, it's just for overweight people." Completely wrong. There are many slim, thin people that have incredibly high cholesterol. It's more than just weight. It's all about overall health and wellbeing.

As of the end of March, they've had 900 team members go through this program. As a result dozens of team members have lost over 100 pounds, reversed diabetes, gotten off all their medications and more.

Incorporating the Four Pillars for a Family

Eating according to the four pillars doesn't have to be expensive.

The best place to start is the bulk department. That means people have to get back into the kitchen. It means boiling beans and cooking grains.

Next, source seasonal products. If you're buying produce, source it when it's in season, and it's going to be cheaper. Canning and prepare ahead of time, when foods are in season.

You can also start a kitchen or small garden at your house.

Lastly, seek out products. The Whole Foods 365 brand is comparable to anything out there price-wise.

Cooking Basics

Start with the handout *A Quick Glance Guide on Grains and Beans*. It basically lists rice, grains, and beans that people may or may not be familiar with.

First is batch cooking. Just as it sounds, batch cooking means making a big batch of something early in the week that you can use several ways on several days. It's not just thinking in the moment. It is shifting our minds a little bit to the way we approach mealtimes.

For example, if you make brown rice one night, double what you need. The next day, you can make a steam fried rice dish with some vegetables and tofu, or whatnot.

Same with beans – make much more than you're going to use and later you can blend them into a pâté, make a sauce, toss into a soup, throw in a salad, etc.

And cooked beans will last for a week.

Many people are afraid to cook beans. First things first, if you live at a higher elevation, adjust cooking times, as this is affected by elevation.

Next a lot of people avoid beans because they're gassy. One of the easiest ways to make them less gassy is to soak them overnight. You can also take a tip from macrobiotics and cook the beans with a kombu, a kind of seaweed. That also removes that gassiness.

Cooking Methods

Look at the handout *Healthy Eating Culinary Methods Defined*. There are some general cooking methods that everybody knows are the healthiest. Let's take a look at a few of them.

- Steaming
- Blanching
 - Steam foods, then place them in an ice bath, or cold water, so it shocks the heat a little bit and they won't continue to cook.
- Braising
 - Also known as pot roasting.

- Good way to infuse flavor, useful for tofu and tempeh.
- Can do in oven or on the stove.
- Use a liquid, such as vegetable stock or wine, or a mixture of the two. Add in lots of fresh herbs or dried spices. Add in whatever you are braising and bring it up to a simmer. Braise it for anywhere from a half-hour to 45 minutes.
- Germinating
 - You can do that through growing your own sprouts.
- Poaching
 - Similar to braising, but typically there is a presence of an acid and a sweetness, such as a fruit.
 - If you want to do poached pears, etc., a great way to infuse flavor into those more is with wine or with some other juices, green tea, or any kind of tea.
 - Bring to a simmer, drop the fruits in there, take them out of the liquid, and you'll have some great infused flavors.
- Slow cooking
 - It's all about setting it and forgetting it.
 - Can use a slow cooker or a crock-pot.
 - Always make sure there's enough liquid in there.
- Steam frying
 - Great way to cook without oil (see handout *Cooking Without Oil*).

Cooking Without Oil

It doesn't matter whether it's olive oil, flax oil, or sunflower oil. Doesn't matter the quality of the oil. It's so calorie dense--anywhere from 120 to 140 calories per tablespoon.

An easy way for people to lighten up their dishes is just to reduce their oil consumption and usage.

When you're not using oil, there are three main principles:

- No fat
- High heat
- Rapid motion.

First, the no fat means eliminating the oil.

Next, you want to start with a very hot pan. You turn the burner on, you keep the pan on there, nothing's in it.

Then you want to do a little droplet test. You can drip water in it, and as soon as it beads up, and starts rolling around the pan, it's hot enough.

Then you have chopped onions--or whatever you're sautéing. You have a hot pan, then you add the chopped onions in.

The science behind this is that if you were to start with a cold pan and put cold onions and then start to heat it up, the pores in the metal are going to contract at the same time the pores in the onions do. That's going to create burning.

If you start with a hot pan, the pores are already contracted. When you add onions that are cold, they are going to contract at a different time, so they won't stick.

Then it's rapid motion, it's shaking the pan, it's using a rubber spatula. Then, without any oil, the onions are starting to cook. They're starting to slowly sweat, and to turn a little translucent.

Then, right when they start to stick, you add a little bit of liquid of your choice...vegetable stock is a good choice. Add as much liquid to the pan as you would add oil to the beginning of the dish. If you would add two tablespoons of oil in the beginning, add two tablespoons of any kind of liquid--wine, beer, stock, anything.

What that does then, you do rapid motion and that deglazes the pan, and it kind of scoops up all the sugars that were just starting to burn out of the onions. Then it instantly caramelizes. You can add herbs into it at that point. Then you can start your dish.

Base Recipes

Look at the *Base Recipes* handout.

If you're making a marinade, dressing, sauce especially, or soup, everything has a base. It's the foundation that you will add herbs, spices, etc. to.

There are four essential base components:

- Fat (coconut, nuts or seeds, nut butters, olives, avocado, etc.)
- Acid
- Salt
- Sweet (optional)

Each of these has a different purpose:

- Fat acts as a vehicle for all the other flavors.
- Acid helps break down the cell wall of vegetables. It also balances out the sweet.
- Salt is a flavor-enhancer.
- Sweet rounds it all out.

Example: Thai peanut sauce

- Almond butter (fat)
- Lime (acid)
- Soy sauce or tamari (salt)

- Dates or maple (sweet)
- Add water for blending purposes
- Consult *Taste of Culture* chart to know what spices to add.
 - All herbs and spices are arranged by cultures.
 - In each culture category, all the herbs/spices blend so you won't ever conflict flavors.
- Add in:
 - Ginger
 - Chili
 - Kaffir lime leaf
- Serve over cauliflower, potatoes, broccoli, or serve with a grain, like jasmine rice.
- Top with toasted cashews, peanuts, or almonds.

Putting Together a Meal

When it comes to cooking, it's 60% ingredients, 30% technique, and 10% risk. When you have these simple tools, it's all about just getting the courage to try new things, and I think that's a great first step.

It's also all about the sauces, marinades, and dressings...which will all be covered. Let's get started with some specific recipes.

- Almond milk
- Green smoothie
- Kale salad
- Broccoli with almond butter sauce
- Basic white sauce
- Baked penne with tofu ricotta and vegetable-packed red sauce

Almond milk

Take raw almonds (can use any raw nut or seed) and have one part nut or seed to three parts water.

Put that in a blender and blend it on high until it's as blended as blended can be.

Take cheesecloth or a fine mesh strainer (also known as a chinois) or any kind of mesh bag and strain it. Then you pour the mixture through that, into a bowl. If you're using a fine mesh strainer, you can also use a rubber spatula.

In the bowl will be silky almond milk.

It will keep in the refrigerator for three to five days. It also freezes well.

Green smoothie

Start with non-dairy milk, such as almond milk. Add in fresh or frozen fruit, then some kale or spinach. You can add a banana, date, a bit of maple if you want and blend well. Delicious!

Kale salad

Chop up some raw kale. You can also use chard or spinach.

Add some avocado for fat and some lemon juice, for the acid. Next, add a pinch of sea salt, and for the sweetener, add some diced bell pepper.

Now that you have the base done, you can build from that. Add some red onion, some green onion, and then a little bit of chili, to give it a little kick.

You can add herbs to this. Then get in there and start mashing the avocado, and creaming the avocado with your hands. Press it as you're doing it, almost massaging the kale. In the end, the kale softens, with the presence of the acid, and the salt, and the avocado creams, it almost creates a dressing. Just that alone is an incredible salad, really simple, really quick.

Thai broccoli with almond chili sauce

Like the sauce above, start with almond butter. Use some lemon juice and dates. Add tamari and then build from there.

Add garlic, water, and ginger. Blend that up until smooth.

The sauce will keep for over a week.

Serve over broccoli or serve it with soba noodles, grilled tofu, etc.

Basic white sauce

With most classical cuisines, there are three main mother sauces: red, brown, and white. This is the white.

Start off with steam frying some onions. Sauté up, add a little vegetable stock, caramelize, and set those aside.

Now take some cashews. You can also use white beans or tofu. If you use the cashews, you can soak them in water for a couple hours to soften them up.

Next, take non-dairy milk. Add some onion powder, and those onions that you just cooked. Add a little bit of white miso and nutritional yeast (can buy in the bulk department in Whole Foods). Blend that up.

This sauce will act as any cream substitution would. This will reduce really nicely, so quickly, and cream up.

Now add some greens to a pan, steam fry up some onions. When the greens start to wilt a little bit, pour the sauce over them. That sauce is going to reduce so quickly, and it's going to really cream and blend the flavors in that sauce nicely.

It's a great side dish. It's great over brown rice. Again, you can make a big batch. It's incredibly affordable if you're using white beans. You can make a big batch of this, take half of it, and freeze it.

Another variation with that cream sauce is to make a gratin. Take thinly sliced potatoes or parsnips or celeriac, and layer it with a little bit of the cream sauce, and then just layer it again with the thinly sliced root. Then layer it up in a casserole dish. Throw some tinfoil on it and bake it. Take the tinfoil off after about a half-hour of it baking, and it'll firm up like a gratin would, so you can actually slice it.

You can make white lasagna, too. Do the same thing--layer it with noodles and do the same thing. You can slice it, and it firms up, because it reduces nicely while it bakes.

Baked penne with tofu ricotta and vegetable-packed red sauce

Start with whole grain pasta. Cook it up and set aside.

Next, make the tofu ricotta. Take a firm tofu, and crumble it up in a bowl. Add a little bit of tahini, some small minced garlic, and some nutritional yeast. Add a bit of nutmeg, a squeeze of lemon, some black pepper, sea salt, a little bit of onion, chopped parsley, basil, and oregano.

Next, steam up some spinach. You can buy frozen spinach as well and let it thaw out. Combine all those ingredients and start crumbling it with your hands, mixing and distributing the tahini and the lemon juice well. It's a delicious ricotta substitution. You can put it on a panini, you can put it in a wrap, you can just crumble it on a pizza.

Now, make the marinara. Heat up the pan, add the diced onions, allow them to caramelize, add the vegetable stock until they're caramelized. Next, add shredded zucchini and carrots. Now add some thinly sliced kale or spinach.. Cook that down for a little while with the onions. These are going to cook and soften and really just start to, melt all together, in terms of the flavors.

Next are the tomatoes. If they are not in season, you can use canned tomatoes (either Muir Glen or San Marzano). Use a combination of sauce and crushed to make a real rustic sauce.

After the kale and zucchini and carrots cook down, add the canned tomatoes. Bring that up to a simmer. Let it reduce a little bit, and then, at the end, add the fresh herbs. If you cook the herbs down with the vegetables and with the onions in the beginning, those are going to start to melt,

and the flavor is going to melt, as well. You're not going to get that layer of flavor that you want to get with the fresh herbs.

Cook that down, season it to taste with salt and pepper, and it's ready to go. You can also can it and throw it in the freezer.

Now throw everything in a big bowl...the cooked penne, the ricotta recipe, the marinara. Toss that and put in a casserole dish, and bake it. You can add a non-dairy cheese or fresh sliced tomatoes on top.

Resources

- Kitchen Wares with Suggested Brands
- Healthy Eating Four Pillars
- Grains Quick Glance Cooking Chart
- Beans Quick Glance Cooking Chart
- Healthy Eating Culinary Methods Defined
- Cooking Without Oil
- Base Components and Base Taste Categories
- Global Taste/Cultural Combining
- Health Starts Here Recipes

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