

The Scoop on GMOs, Part 1

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Q&A with Melissa Diane Smith, author of *Going Against GMOs*

October is now dubbed “Non-GMO Month.” It’s designed to increase awareness and education about the many issues surrounding genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in our food. With that in mind, I thought it was a perfect time to interview my long time colleague, holistic nutritionist Melissa Diane Smith.

I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with Melissa for over 20 years and have found her to be a gifted writer and passionate researcher. I knew that her latest book *Going Against GMOs: The Fast-Growing Movement to Avoid Unnatural Genetically Modified “Foods” to Take Back Our Food and Health* (www.goingagainstgmos.com) would be an eye-opener!



Thank you for being a guest on my blog, Melissa. You wrote about overlooked health troubles associated with grains in *Going Against the Grain* and have written about many other food-related topics.

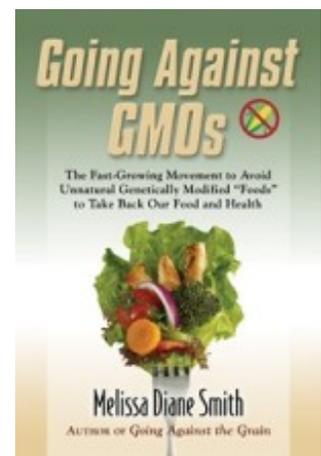
What made you decide to write a book about GMOs?

GMOs actually have become the food issue of our time. Unfortunately, we’ve been kept in the dark about this topic for 20 years, and most Americans can’t define GMOs, don’t know which foods are likely to be genetically modified, and don’t understand the many risks and issues genetically modified (GM) foods pose. I felt it was time to shine a light on the topic and create an easy-to-read consumer’s guide that presented the information in the same way that I do as both a speaker and holistic nutrition coach.

The thing that most prompted me to write the book, however, was the experience of a client Marcia, whose story I share in the Introduction of the book. She had been eating gluten free for eight years before she came to see me. But she still had a wide range of health problems, including many food allergies and a supposedly “incurable” immune system condition.

Because of the research I delved into about GMOs, I suggested that she remove the GMOs from her diet. She did, and the results astounded both of us! Her health problems improved across the board; the immune cell counts tested to monitor her immune system problem normalized; and she actually saved \$7,000 in medical expenses in the first year of avoiding GMOs!

Those results had a powerful impact on me. Once I saw what avoiding GMOs did for her, I realized that I couldn’t go on writing about therapeutic diets without addressing the huge elephant in the room: that many of our foods are no longer real food anymore! Multinational chemical corporations changed our God- or nature-given foods on the *inside* in the most radical ways ever, and none of us were going to be able to stay well or get well without understanding those basic facts and getting back to the organic real food that our ancestors ate.



So, what exactly are GMOs, and what kinds of risks do they pose?

GMOs look the same as foods used to. But they’re very different on the inside. Engineers insert genes

from one living thing into the DNA of an unrelated living thing to create a genetically modified organism (GMO) that would never occur in nature. The two most common types of genetically modified crops on the market are those that have been engineered to have a little bit of insecticide inside every bite and those that resist (and don't die from) repeated applications of herbicides such as Roundup.

No one likes the idea of eating those types of "foods," but there's more: The FDA doesn't conduct safety studies on GM foods; it leaves determining their safety up to the companies that make them. And 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 herbicides, including those that have been declared probable and possible carcinogens (cancer-causing substances), and they pollute our land and water and get on and in 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 want 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! When people realize that corporations have been taking over control and ownership of more of our food for their profit, they realize it's an anti-democratic issue we have to stand against, which is why the non-GMO movement is growing like wildfire.

What are some of the main challenges of going against GMOs?

People quickly start to realize that 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 at first is uncomfortable and overwhelming. It takes time to change longstanding buying and eating habits. Understand that it's a process and start somewhere—even if it's just eating one non-GMO or organic meal a day. Be patient with the time it takes to learn how to be a savvy non-GMO shopper. A great way to gradually learn that information is to follow the Eat GMO-Free Challenge—a tip a day for 31 days—in the book or at www.EatGMOfreeChallenge.com.

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.

You list four basic guidelines for avoiding GMOs. What are they?

- Buy Organic. By law, products that have the USDA Organic seal cannot contain any GMO ingredients.
- Look for Non-GMO Project Verified seals. Products that carry the seal are independently verified to be in compliance with North America's only third party standard for GMO avoidance, including testing of at-risk ingredients.
- Learn and avoid the at-risk crops and products.
- Avoid the indirect sources of GMOs: Gradually upgrade the animal protein sources that you eat, switching from conventional meats and dairy products from animals or farmed fish fed GMO feed to organic poultry, organic grass-fed meats, and wild-caught fish.



At-risk foods to know by heart—the GM crops that are now in our foods and should be avoided unless

organic or non-GMO—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** (as in “sugar” in an ingredient, which is almost certainly a combination of sugar from both sugar cane and GM sugar beets)
- **Soybeans** (as in soybean oil, soy protein, soy lecithin, soy milk, tofu, and other soy-based ingredients)
- **Alfalfa**, which is fed to livestock
- **Apple**, which will be arriving in some stores in 2016
- **Papaya (from Hawaii and China)**
- **Potatoes**, which were sold in 10 states this summer and will be sold in a larger number next year
- **Yellow Squash and Zucchini** (look for those labeled organic or grown from non-GMO seed)

Also avoid these two additional, especially nasty GM products that are added to foods:

- **Aspartame** (in diet soft drinks and NutraSweet artificial sweetener)
- **rBGH** (recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone, also known as Bovine Somatotropin or bST, which was developed from genetically engineered *coli* bacteria and is injected into some cows to increase milk production.) You can look for dairy products labeled rBGH-free, also known as bST-free, or better yet, milk products labeled organic.

Once you learn these basics, it’s important to go beyond just non-GMO and combine non-GMO knowledge with other rules of good nutrition for optimal health.

In Part 2 of this interview next week, we’ll discuss that important point and other cutting-edge information from *Going Against GMOs* author Melissa Diane Smith.