The fussy eater
Ariel Leve

Superfoods are like iPads. Nobody needs them, but you're made to feel that you're missing out

I remember a time when I used to buy eggs and the only thing I worried about were whether or not they were broken. Now shopping for eggs requires a master's degree. Are they organic? Are they cage-free? Was the hen happy? The other day I purchased a carton of eggs and there was a pamphlet inside. It began: "Dear Egg Buyer". There was so much information about the eggs and the hens and the farm that they came from, it was depressing. Do I really need to know the hens have sunlit barns and porches? They live better than I do. I live in a tiny darkened box with little sunlight and no air. So basically, I wouldn't wish my life on a hen.

I'm not sure when it happened but somewhere along the way the marketing of the farming industry became ubiquitous. It was not longer just about how nutritious the food was but information on where it came from and how it reached us was mandatory. Not to mention the medicinal and cosmetic benefits. It's no longer enough for food to be tasty, it has to be healing.

But there's a problem. Whenever I'm eating regular food I feel bad I'm not eating superfood. A blueberry is no longer a blueberry, it's a "miracle berry". I feel sorry for the raspberries. Why buy a boring old raspberry when you can buy a miracle berry?

Then there is acai. Which I can't even pronounce. This is the iPad of berries. You don't actually need it but if you don't have it you're made to feel like you're missing out. It may not be available in the local supermarket but you better believe it's worth finding it. The acai makes the blueberry seem amateur. The other day I came upon an article titled: The Truth About Acai. Are people that concerned that a berry needs to be investigated?

I saw an article called The Truth about Acai. Does a berry need to be investigated?

Once I understood superfoods were essential, there was no turning back. I've been hoovering up avocado because I read that avocado is loaded with amino acids and good for my skin. Also nuts reduce the visible signs of ageing like wrinkles and sagging skin. Forget expensive face creams – I'll have a bowl of walnuts. So, I'm faithfully eating my superfoods every day and guess what happens? I'm getting fat.

My all time favourite on the superfood checklist is dark chocolate. I'm not really sure what antioxidants do exactly but they make me feel better about eating what used to be known as candy. And now that I know dark chocolate lowers my blood pressure? I can eat the whole bar.

I went to dinner in Manhattan at a farm-to-table restaurant. The tomato was "sourced locally". As in, on the roof the building? How local is local? The waiter seemed to think the tomato would taste better if I knew where it came from. I interrupted the monologue. "Do you have to go through this with every customer?" I asked. He gave me a look. It wasn't a: yes-I-do-can-you-believe-it look. It was a: yes-I-do-and-what's-wrong-with-you look.

And therein lies the problem. It's not the food that annoys me, it's the people who fetishise it. I don't always want to think about where it's grown and how it's been harvested or what kind of degenerative illness it will cure. Am I eating the right thing? Is my food safe? What if I'm ingesting pesticides that will give me cancer? Does the tuna have mercury? Hormones? Is it organic? Fairtrade? I worry about enough as it is. **OFM**

ariel.leve@observer.co.uk

KITCHEN APPS

OFM tests foodie-friendly apps. Eat, drink, download...

Harden's

What is it?
This is the phone-sized version of the UK's largest annual survey of restaurant goers. The cost? £5.99

The wisdom of crowds in action?
Pretty much, the snappy and sometimes snitty adjective-filled reviews are ideally suited to the app format. Nobu is "not hip anymore"; while the River Café is "divine" and Marcus Wareing at the Berkeley "meticulous".

Weakness?
London biased. Only five places are listed in the county of Conwy in Wales, while there are 1,829 in the capital. And some of its contributors are just plain greedy – £28 a head in Benugo?

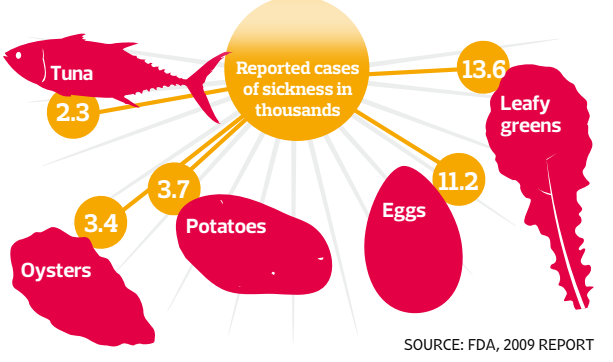
Better than the book?
You can search by a smorgasbord of criteria, find eateries via GSP and, unlike the book, you can use it to reserve a table.

Download?
Yes, even if you aren't a restaurant critic like our own Jay Rayner.

THE PIE CHART

The month in food, at a glance

The most dangerous foodstuffs in America, 2008–2009



SOURCE: FDA, 2009 REPORT

ALAMY