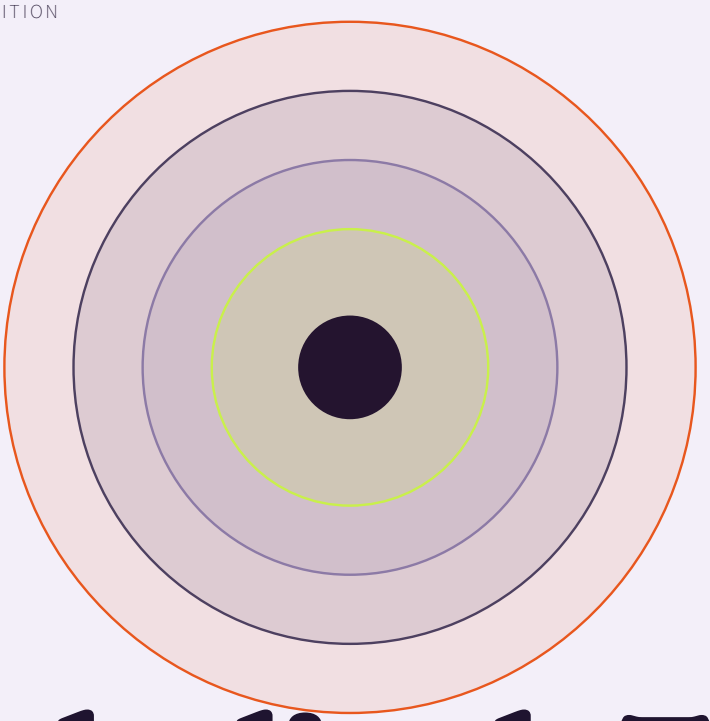


Metabolical: The Lure and the Lies of Processed Food, Nutrition, and Modern Medicine

A reading of the book by Robert H. Lustig (2021)

1. ACTION BOOK

CONTENTS

Inside this edition

The book in a minute 4

The takeaways 5

Your action book 7

Before you go 8

PART TWO · THE ACTION BOOK

The setup checklist 10

Read the first three ingredients 11

Eat fruit, don't drink it 12

Put a fibre food on every plate 13

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Metabolical: The Lure and the Lies of Processed Food, Nutrition, and Modern Medicine, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Robert H. Lustig is a paediatric endocrinologist and emeritus professor of paediatrics at the University of California, San Francisco, best known for his work on sugar and childhood obesity. In Metabolical he argues that most of the chronic diseases that fill clinics, such as type 2 diabetes, fatty liver disease and heart disease, grow from a small set of problems inside our cells, and that processed food drives them. He names eight subcellular pathologies, among them insulin resistance, mitochondrial dysfunction and inflammation, and argues that drugs mostly treat their symptoms while food can reach the causes. His test for real food is that it protects the liver and feeds the gut. He builds the case from biochemistry and nutrition research, and turns it on the food industry, regulators and a medical system that treats disease after it appears.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Many chronic diseases may be one cellular problem wearing different names.

Lustig argues that type 2 diabetes, fatty liver disease, heart disease and several other conditions share the same few faults inside the cell. He counts eight of them, from glycation to autophagy. If he is right, fixing the shared faults helps several diagnoses at once.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A pill can move a number without fixing the cell that moved it.

Drugs for blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure act on the readings. Lustig's point is that the eight sub-cellular pathologies are hard to treat with drugs but respond to what you eat, which he calls being foodable. That is a reason to change food alongside treatment, never a reason to drop treatment on your own.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The problem is less what is in the food than what was done to it.

Processing adds sugar, strips out fibre and changes fats so a product lasts longer and costs less. Lustig cares more about that treatment than about counting single nutrients. An apple and apple juice contain the same sugar, but only one still has its fibre.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Real food passes two tests: it protects the liver and it feeds the gut.

This is the book's rule of thumb. The liver handles most of the fructose and alcohol you take in, and the gut and its bacteria need fibre. A food that spares one and feeds the other is doing its job.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Added sugar is a liver problem before it is a weight problem.

Lustig argues that fructose is processed mostly in the liver, and that a large dose without fibre pushes the liver to turn some of it into fat. He links that liver fat to insulin resistance. Other researchers think the harm comes mostly from extra calories overall, so how special fructose is remains debated.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Fibre is the first thing processing takes out, and one of the most useful.

In Lustig's account fibre slows how fast sugar reaches the liver and feeds the bacteria in the gut. Whole fruit comes with its fibre and juice does not. Refining grain and juicing fruit both remove it.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

You can be a normal weight and still be metabolically unwell.

Lustig stresses that weight is a poor guide to what is happening inside the cell. Some people of normal weight carry fat in the liver and show insulin resistance. The scale cannot tell you that, which is one reason to talk to your doctor about other checks.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A food system built for shelf life and price is not built for your cells.

Lustig points at the food industry for selling products made to keep and to sell, and at regulators and dietary advice for being slow to respond. He also faults medicine for being organised around treating disease once it shows up. He treats this as a system problem, not a willpower problem.

9

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Changing what you eat can change what your medicine does, so keep your doctor in the loop.

Eating less sugar and more fibre can shift blood sugar and blood pressure, sometimes quickly. If you take medicine for either, a dose that was right before may not be right after. Deciding that is your doctor's job, not a book's.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Audit the five foods you buy most
- [ ] Learn sugar's other names
- [ ] Swap the drink you have most
- [ ] Stock one shelf with fibre
- [ ] Talk to your doctor first

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Read the first three ingredients
- ◯ Eat fruit, don't drink it
- ◯ Put a fibre food on every plate

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

☐ SETUP 1

Audit the five foods you buy most

Pull the five packaged foods you buy every week out of the cupboard.

Run each through the label audit on this page and note which fail both tests.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 2

Learn sugar's other names

Write down every name for sugar you find on your labels this week: glucose syrup, dextrose, fruit juice concentrate, invert sugar and the rest.

Keep the list on your phone for shopping.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 3

Swap the drink you have most

Sugary drinks bring sugar with no fibre to slow it down.

Pick the one you drink most often and replace it with water, sparkling water, tea or coffee for the next seven days.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 4

Stock one shelf with fibre

Fill one shelf with foods that still have their fibre: oats, beans, lentils, nuts, and frozen vegetables and fruit.

Make it the first place you look when you are hungry.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 5

Talk to your doctor first

If you take medicine for blood sugar, blood pressure or cholesterol, tell your doctor before you change how you eat.

Ask which checks of your metabolic health make sense for you.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Read the first three ingredients

Before anything goes in the basket, read the first three ingredients.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Eat fruit, don't drink it

Have the orange instead of the orange juice, and the apple instead of the smoothie.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Put a fibre food on every plate

At each meal, add one thing that still has its fibre: beans, lentils, vegetables, whole grains, nuts or whole fruit.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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December 2026

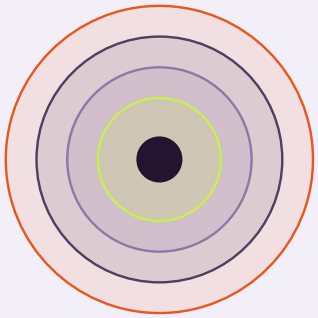
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Judge a food by what it does to your liver and your gut, not by what the front of the box says.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER ROBERT H. LUSTIG

Read it online, and vote on the takeaways:
hourlife.com/books/metabolical
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