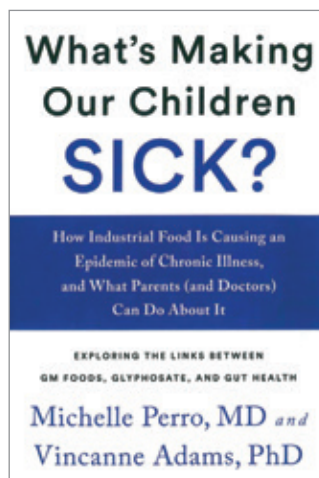


# What's Making Our Children Sick?

HOW INDUSTRIAL FOOD IS CAUSING AN EPIDEMIC OF CHRONIC ILLNESS,  
AND WHAT PARENTS (AND DOCTORS) CAN DO ABOUT IT



By Michelle Perro, MD  
and Vincanne Adams, PhD,  
Chelsea Green Publishing,  
White River Junction, Vermont,  
2017, 257 pages

This is a book I would like to put in the hands of every parent (or parent-to-be) of young children. Michele Perro, MD is a pediatrician practicing integrative medicine, which means that she uses methods from a variety of medical traditions. Her major focus is on food—both as a source of illness and a remedy

for it. This book contains several case studies of her young patients who suffered from serious chronic illnesses, including autism, celiac disease, asthma, developmental delays, and eczema. Her treatments generally start with removal of foods that often cause sensitivities, homeopathic medicines for detoxification, and an organic diet. However, she also includes conventional pharmaceutical medicines in her practice.

The first subtitle of the book is “How Industrial Food Is Causing an Epidemic of Chronic Illness, and What Parents (and Doctors) Can Do About It.” The case studies in the book are interspersed with an analysis of chronic illnesses arising from foods and the chemical-intensive food production system. *What's Making Our Children Sick?* complements *The Hidden Half of Nature* by David Montgomery, PhD, and Anne Bicklé (reviewed in the Spring 2017 issue of *Pesticides and You*). That book looked at the microbiome in the gut and in the soil from an ecological perspective. Drs. Perro and Adams take a medical approach to the same subject. The microbiome in the human gut is medically important because of its central immune system function and its relationship to mental health.

This book identifies as a central important part of the microbiome story, “Whatever disrupts a healthy gut environment

probably has significant impacts on the ways in which genes are turned off or on that, in turn, play a key role in regulating all of the body's physiology,” which brings us to the second subtitle of the book: “Exploring the Links Between GM Foods, Glyphosate, and Gut Health.”

Although the authors investigate impacts of many pesticides through foods and other exposures, they find that genetically modified (GM) foods are “the key ingredient in the larger pesticide problem.” [Emphasis in original.] They present evidence that GM foods themselves are harmful because of changes in nutritional value and other qualities of the food. However, the larger impacts come from the system in which the GM foods are used. Indeed, although it is often difficult to distinguish the impacts of the GM food itself from the effects of the glyphosate that is sprayed on most of it, evidence does support claims that the herbicide also changes nutritional value of the food and disrupts the gut microbiome.

In spite of the difficulty for a clinician to sort out the science of causality, the authors repeatedly state the importance of switching to an organic diet in treating chronic disease—“Without changing to organic, even the best of treatments and successes aren't, in Dr. Perro's experience, able to be sustained.”

And the importance of organic goes beyond the individual. As they explain, “What we are saying is that we need a type of medicine that understands how patients are part of a med-ico-environmental ecosystem, what we call *ecomedicine*. Considering food-related causes of ill health means thinking beyond the normal list of diseases that students are currently taught in medical school and also beyond the normal list of drug therapies that are available for these diseases.... In this ecosystem, health can be sought and achieved only if the food ecosystem itself is healthy.”

The book concludes with a call to action and explanation of why the authors wrote the book—to support those parents driven to ensure that their children are healthy. It is a great tool to put in the hands of those parents.

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