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## HEALTHY CHOICES FOR MIND AND BODY

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### **DEATH BY PURITY**

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Eating too healthfully? Thought that wasn't possible? The first reported death due to food-purity fanaticism occurred in December 2003. The woman suffered from orthorexia nervosa, a newly coined name for a pathological obsession with food quality and purity. She died from heart failure due to starvation. People with the disorder strictly avoid of caffeine, preservatives, salt, sugar, refined or processed foods and any type of food contaminant. The focus is on 'healthy' food, not body size, and the obsession may replace other interests and activities and cause social isolation.

Psychiatry has yet to accept orthorexia nervosa as an official diagnosis. To do so would require standardized diagnostic criteria. Assuming Americans fall somewhere on a continuum of junk food junkie to healthy consumer to nutso, the criteria would have to establish a cut-off between those who make some changes to promote health and those whose obsession puts them at health risk. Just where does 'normal' end?