

Psychology explains why many people fear GM foods

The brain is first and foremost in charge of keeping us alive and it uses everything it can to figure out whether something might pose a risk, including not only conscious reasoning but all the subconscious animal instincts we have evolved to make quick protective judgments about whether something feels scary.

So how do such shortcuts influence, say, a young man in a coffee shop's fears of GMOs? Is he completely informed about biotechnology, about how genetically modified food is created, or grown? No. But he does know that some of his food might be produced by Monsanto or DuPont, those evil chemical companies that make pesticides and all sorts of toxic industrial chemicals (insert scary music here).

So, in the name of assessing whether GMOs might be a potential risk and trying to keep himself safe, he subconsciously opens the filing cabinets of what he does know and, based on common fear of “chemicals” and “pesticides” and widespread mistrust of “chemical companies”, GMOs therefore represent something that feels scary.

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