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ORGANIC FOOD: THE LATEST HEALTH BUZZ

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Organic foods are popping up in every aisle of the supermarket from fresh fruits and vegetables to baby foods, cereals, milk, meat... you name it! But are organic foods safer or healthier than conventional foods?

Organic is a labeling term indicating that a certain food was produced in accordance with the U.S. Organic Foods Production Act. Rather than describing any particular characteristic of the food itself, the label "organic" actually describes the methods used to produce the food product. In order to be labeled "organic", a food must be grown and/or processed without the use of chemical herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers and must not have been treated with hormones, antibiotics, coloring agents, preservatives or artificial ingredients of any kind. Meats labeled as organic must be raised without the use of antibiotics or hormones, given 100% organic feed that is pesticide free and have access to the outdoors. "100% Organic" means that the product contains only organic ingredients, "Organic" means that 95% of the ingredients are organic and "Made with Organic Ingredients" means that 70% of the ingredients are organic.



There are many studies that link pesticides with cancer. As far back as 1987, a National Academy of Sciences report estimated that pesticides are responsible for up to 1.4 million cases of cancer. However, the levels of pesticide residue in traditional foods are not always known and further studies need to be completed to determine this relationship.

Are organic foods healthier? There

are many studies that show that organic produce has higher levels of antioxidants, Vitamin C, phosphorus, magnesium and iron. Remember that it is better to have conventional fruits and vegetables than no fruits and vegetables at all! Since organic foods can be more expensive than conventional foods, it is best to avoid produce that contains that highest pesticide residue (called the "Dirty Dozen"- see list below). It is also best to buy organic beef, poultry, eggs, dairy and baby food when possible.

Organically grown foods use methods that are more environmentally friendly than conventional foods. Modern agricultural depletes the soil of nutrients, increasing the need for fertilizers, which leads to further erosion of soil. When pesticides are sprayed on food they seep into the soil and get into our groundwater. Transporting food long distances requires a great amount of fossil fuel energy. This pollutes our air and water, while compounding the harmful impacts of global climate change. The best choice for our environment is organic and locally grown!

Choosing organic is a personal decision. Try to choose the items that might be most contaminated with pesticides (listed below). If it is within your budget try to include other organic foods for their health benefits and to help protect our environment. For more information, check out www.healthychild.org and www.ewg.org.

CHOOSING ORGANIC

"Dirty Dozen"
Most contaminated foods with pesticides:

1. Peaches (worst — highest pesticide load)
2. Apples
3. Sweet bell peppers
4. Celery
5. Nectarines
6. Strawberries
7. Cherries
8. Lettuce
9. Grapes — imported
10. Pears
11. Spinach
12. Potatoes

The Cleanest 12:
Least contaminated foods with pesticides:

1. Onions (best — lowest pesticide load)
2. Avocado
3. Sweet corn — frozen
4. Pineapples
5. Mango
6. Sweet peas — frozen
7. Asparagus
8. Kiwi
9. Bananas
10. Cabbage
11. Broccoli
12. Eggplant

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