



Organic Foods

What does "organic" mean?

- Foods labeled "100% organic" and "organic" must be free of growth hormones and antibiotics. Organic foods are made without chemicals, additives or man-made pesticides. These foods are produced without the use of sewage sludge or radiation.
- Products labeled as "100% organic" must have only organically produced ingredients.
- All products claiming to be organic are put through government inspection and approval in order to be "certified organic".
- If a food product is at least 95% organic, it can have the "organic" as well as the round "USDA organic" seal also. If organic ingredients in a food product make up 70-94% of that product, then "organic" can be on the sides or the back of the label to describe those ingredients.

Why choose organic foods?

- Some research shows that organic fruit and vegetables are higher in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants.
- Some studies show that organic foods reduce contact to pesticides in the diet. Pesticides have been shown to be harmful to health. However, the amounts found on conventionally grown fruits and vegetables are considered safe by the USDA. Health experts agree that the benefit of eating fruits and vegetables conventionally grown outweighs the risk of danger from pesticides.

Helpful information on organic foods:

- Organic foods and produce may spoil faster as certain chemicals to preserve foods aren't used.
- Food companies can label their foods as "natural", "cage-free", or "hormone-free", but that does not mean that the product is organic.
- Organic foods often cost more than non-organic. Organics in general cost 57% more than non-organic foods because of higher production costs, more crop losses and smaller crop yields as well. Today, organic produce has increased in major supermarkets. Sales and coupons for organic foods can be found.
- People may choose organic foods for reasons related to personal health or to support a better environment. But if you cannot afford organic food or it is not available nearby, you can still gain health benefits from eating conventional fruits and vegetables.
- Several studies have been done showing that eating (conventionally grown) fruits and vegetables protects against some diseases such as mouth and throat cancers.
- No studies have shown that the trace amounts of pesticides found on fruit and vegetables are linked with cancer or other diseases.

Shopping tips:

- Shop for organic fruits and vegetables on days that produce is delivered so you get the freshest foods.
- Buy organic produce based on what is in season at the time. This will save you money and give you peak freshness!
- Wash all fruits or vegetables with a scrub brush. Rinse them well. Certain conventionally grown produce absorb and hold on to more pesticides than others. These include apples, lettuce, grapes, strawberries and pears. If you consume a lot of these and are worried, organics may be an option.
- Throw away the outer leaves of vegetables such as cabbage and lettuce. Rinse the rest of the head well.
- Peel waxed fruits and vegetables. Waxes don't wash off and can seal in pesticide residues.
- Shop wisely for organic produce. Foodnews has an excellent website- <http://www.foodnews.org/walletguide.php>
- "Sustainable agriculture" and "fair-trade" are two terms that are becoming more common in the grocery stores today. Check out www.sustainable.org and www.transfairusa.org to learn more.

For information about pesticides in foods and how it may affect your decision to eat more organic produce please visit <http://www.healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/cancer-patients/nutrition/faq/Pesticides.pdf>

Contact the Cancer Center dietitian at (434) 243-9627 if you have questions about organics or any other nutrition concerns.

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