

# The Importance of Eating Organic

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Choosing organic products for yourself and your family is one of the most proactive measures you can implement to take control of your health
- Choosing organic foods lowers your exposure to pesticides. Research shows negative health effects may occur in children at current levels of exposure to pesticides
- Organically grown foods contain higher levels of antioxidants and healthy fats than conventionally grown varieties
- Soil depletion is a direct result of modern agricultural practices and has led to crops containing fewer nutrients. To receive the same amount of iron you used to get from one apple in 1950, by 1998 you had to eat 26 apples
- By buying organic, you also support the mitigation of climate change, protect the environment, promote animal welfare and farmer profitability, and ensure your food is not genetically engineered

## 30 Tips in 30 Days Designed to Help You Take Control of Your Health

This article is included in Dr. Mercola's All-Time Top 30 Health Tips series. Every day during the month of January, a new tip will be added that will help you take control of your health.

Many want to lead a healthier lifestyle but cannot figure out where or how to start. In the realm of diet, more than half believe it's easier to calculate their income taxes than figure out what to eat.<sup>1</sup> While nutritional science is indeed a complex affair, there's a way to make it really, really simple: Just eat organic.

*"Let thy medicine be thy medicine, and thy medicine be thy food."*

That famous quote by Hippocrates, who is often referred to as "the father of medicine," is somewhere around 2,500 years old, and for a long time this sentiment was treated as fact.

Today, many scoff at this notion, thinking nutrition and medicine have very little in common, using food to quench hunger and little else, while turning to pharmaceutical drugs to treat illness. Turning our backs on the fundamental truth that "food is medicine" is no doubt at the very heart of our current disease epidemics.

Another quote by Hippocrates, which is part of the Hippocratic Oath still recited by modern doctors today, is "First, do no harm." Unfortunately, the preoccupation with the idea that

there must be "a pill for every ill" now greatly compromises this oath, because the practice of medicine is primarily focused on drugs that oftentimes do far more harm than good.

Meanwhile, modern doctors receive virtually no training in nutrition. The 2018 documentary, "Organic Food — Hype or Hope?" analyzes the benefits of organically grown foods.

How are they different from conventional and do they really live up to the promise of being healthier? Indeed, there's compelling evidence that organic food is a vital aspect of vibrant health, and is a truly practical solution to many of our current health and environmental crises.<sup>2</sup>

## **Organic Food Significantly Lowers Your Toxic Burden**

Pesticides, in particular, pose risks to human health, and not just from contaminated food but also from contaminated groundwater — an issue covered in the featured documentary.

While U.S. regulators insist that set limits on pesticide residues in conventional produce are enough to protect public health, a 2016 report<sup>3</sup> commissioned by the European Parliament found negative health effects may occur in children even at current levels of exposure. A key message of the report was that public health could be protected by promoting organic agriculture.

In 2017, Hilal Elver, the United Nations' special rapporteur on the right to food, and Baskut Tuncak, special rapporteur on toxics, took it a step further, calling for a global treaty to regulate pesticides, saying these chemicals have become a very troubling and pervasive food contaminant that threatens the health of children.<sup>4,5</sup>

"It is time to overturn the myth that pesticides are necessary to feed the world and create a global process to transition toward safer and healthier food and agricultural production," they noted in their report. Organic farming has other benefits as well, including:

- Mitigating climate change
- Promoting animal welfare
- Being more profitable for farmers<sup>6,7</sup>
- Ensuring the food isn't genetically engineered (GE) or contains genetically modified organisms (GMOs). This is true for animal products as well, as animals raised on organic farms are not permitted to be fed GE alfalfa or GE corn

## **Modern Agricultural Practices Have Led to Decline in Food Quality**

Soil depletion is a direct result of modern agricultural practices and has led to crops containing fewer nutrients. Reductions in biodiversity and a narrowing of available foodstuffs has also resulted in a narrower range of nutrients in our diets.

Even the healthy foods you choose, such as an apple or lettuce, are likely not as nutritious as they once were, and wild plants widely foraged in the past provided an astounding level of phytonutrients that are largely absent from our modern cultivated fruits and veggies.

For instance, according to Jo Robinson, author of "Eating on the Wild Side," purple potatoes native to Peru contain 28 times more anthocyanins than commonly consumed russet potatoes.<sup>8</sup>

[Work by Dr. August Dunning](#), chief science officer and co-owner of Eco Organics, reveals that in order to receive the same amount of iron you used to get from one [apple](#) in 1950, by 1998 you had to eat 26 apples. Flavor has also fallen by the wayside, and this too is related to the deterioration of mineral content. The minerals actually form the compounds that give the fruit or vegetable its flavor.

## **Organic Foods Have Fewer Pesticides and Higher Antioxidant Content**

Eating organic is one of the easiest ways to optimize your nutrition without supplementation (although certain supplements may still be necessary or advisable, depending on your condition and overall diet). Studies have repeatedly shown that organic foods: a) have much lower pesticide residues; and b) contain higher amounts of health-promoting nutrients.

Among them is a meta-analysis<sup>9</sup> by Stanford University, published in 2012, which looked at 240 studies comparing organically and conventionally grown food. Organics were 23 to 37 percent less likely to contain detectable pesticide residues.

Considering the [health dangers associated with pesticides](#), this is clear evidence that organics confer greater health benefits than conventional produce. Organically raised chicken was also up to 45 percent less likely to contain [antibiotic-resistant bacteria](#), which will also help protect your health.

Following in Stanford University's footsteps, a group of scientists at Newcastle University in the U.K. evaluated an even greater number of studies, 343 in all, published over several decades. Just like the Stanford study, this follow-up analysis,<sup>10</sup> published in 2014, found that while conventional and organic vegetables oftentimes contain similar levels of many nutrients, the frequency of occurrence of pesticide residues was four times higher in conventional foods.

Conventional produce also had on average 48 percent higher levels of cadmium,<sup>11</sup> a toxic metal and a known carcinogen. Moreover, while many nutrient levels were comparable, a

key nutritional difference between conventional and organics was their antioxidant content.

In the Newcastle analysis, organic fruits and vegetables were found to contain anywhere from 18 to 69 percent more antioxidants than conventionally grown varieties.

Antioxidants are a very important part of optimal health, as they influence how fast you age by fighting free radicals. So, the fact that organic foods contain far higher levels of them vouches for the stance that organic foods are healthier in terms of nutrition, in addition to being lower in pesticides.

## Organic Grass Fed Milk and Meat Are Healthier Than Factory Farmed

Two 2016 studies<sup>12</sup> — one on the compositional differences of organic and conventional meat,<sup>13</sup> and one on milk<sup>14</sup> — also found clear differences between the two. Said to be the largest studies of their kind, the researchers analyzed 196 and 67 studies on milk and meat respectively.

The largest difference in nutritional content of meat was its fatty acid composition, certain essential minerals and antioxidants. Coauthor Chris Seal, professor of food and human nutrition at Newcastle University, commented on the findings:<sup>15</sup>

*"Omega-3s are linked to reductions in cardiovascular disease, improved neurological development and function, and better immune function. Western European diets are recognized as being too low in these fatty acids and the European Food Safety Authority recommends we should double our intake.*

*But getting enough in our diet is difficult. Our study suggests that switching to organic would go some way toward improving intakes of these important nutrients."*

According to the review on milk, half a liter of organic full fat milk will provide you with an estimated 39 milligrams (mg) or 16 percent of the reference daily intake (RDI) of very long-chain (VLC) omega-3 (EPA, DPA and DHA), whereas conventional milk will provide only 25 mg or 11 percent of the RDI of these important fats.

As noted in the milk study,<sup>16</sup> VLC omega-3s have been linked to a number of health benefits, including "improved fetal brain development and function, delayed decline in cognitive function in elderly men and reduced risk of dementia (especially Alzheimer's disease)."

Organic milk also contains lower levels of [omega-6](#), providing a healthier ratio between these two fatty acids. Compared to conventional milk, organic milk was also found to contain:

- Higher levels of vitamin E
- Higher concentrations of iron
- Higher levels of antioxidant carotenoids
- 40 percent more conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), which has a wide array of important health benefits, from fighting cancer to decreasing insulin resistance and improving body composition

Other studies looking at grass fed beef,<sup>17</sup> organic grass fed milk<sup>18</sup> and organic free-range eggs<sup>19</sup> have come to similar conclusions. A 2016 report<sup>20</sup> by the European Parliament, "Human Health Implications of Organic Food and Organic Agriculture," also reviewed the nutritional content of organics (among many other things), concluding that the clearest benefits of organics on human health were found to be related to lowered pesticide, antibiotic and cadmium exposure.

According to the authors, "As a consequence of reduced pesticide exposure, organic food consequently contributes to the avoidance of health effects and associated costs to society."

## Healthy Food Resources

Ultimately, choosing organic products for yourself and your family is one of the most proactive measures you can implement to take control of your health. If you must choose between which products to purchase organic, I recommend prioritizing organic animal foods and then using the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) "Dirty Dozen" list<sup>21</sup> for produce.

The dirty dozen list shows which fruits and vegetables are most prone to heavy pesticide contamination and therefore the most important to buy organic.

Keep in mind that while many grocery stores now carry organic items, these are typically imported from other countries, which may or may not have stringent organic standards in place. Ideally, try to buy as much as you can directly from local farmers, whom you can ask directly about their agricultural practices. If you live in the U.S., the following organizations can help you locate farm-fresh foods:

**[Demeter USA](#)** — Demeter-USA.org provides a directory of certified Biodynamic farms and brands. This directory can also be found on **[BiodynamicFood.org](#)**.

**[American Grassfed Association \(AGA\)](#)** — The goal of the American Grassfed Association is to promote the grass fed industry through government relations, research, concept marketing and public education. Their website also allows you to search for AGA approved producers certified according to strict standards that include being raised on a diet of 100 percent forage; raised on pasture and never confined to a feedlot; never treated with antibiotics or hormones; and born and raised on American family farms.

[\*\*EatWild.com\*\*](#) — EatWild.com provides lists of farmers known to produce raw dairy products as well as grass fed beef and other farm-fresh produce (although not all are certified organic). Here you can also find information about local farmers markets, as well as local stores and restaurants that sell grass fed products.

[\*\*Weston A. Price Foundation\*\*](#) — Weston A. Price has local chapters in most states, and many of them are connected with buying clubs in which you can easily purchase organic foods, including grass fed raw dairy products like milk and butter.

[\*\*Grassfed Exchange\*\*](#) — The Grassfed Exchange has a listing of producers selling organic and grass fed meats across the U.S.

[\*\*Local Harvest\*\*](#) — This website will help you find farmers markets, family farms and other sources of sustainably grown food in your area where you can buy produce, grass fed meats and many other goodies.

[\*\*Farmers Markets\*\*](#) — A national listing of farmers markets.

[\*\*Eat Well Guide: Wholesome Food from Healthy Animals\*\*](#) — The Eat Well Guide is a free online directory of sustainably raised meat, poultry, dairy and eggs from farms, stores, restaurants, inns, hotels and online outlets in the United States and Canada.

[\*\*Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture \(CISA\)\*\*](#) — CISA is dedicated to sustaining agriculture and promoting the products of small farms.

[\*\*The Cornucopia Institute\*\*](#) — The Cornucopia Institute maintains web-based tools rating all certified organic brands of eggs, dairy products and other commodities, based on their ethical sourcing and authentic farming practices separating CAFO "organic" production from authentic organic practices.

[\*\*RealMilk.com\*\*](#) — If you're still unsure of where to find raw milk, check out Raw-Milk-Facts.com and RealMilk.com. They can tell you what the status is for legality in your state, and provide a listing of raw dairy farms in your area. The Farm to Consumer Legal Defense Fund<sup>22</sup> also provides a state-by-state review of raw milk laws.<sup>23</sup> California residents can also find raw milk retailers using the store locator available at [www.OrganicPastures.com](http://www.OrganicPastures.com).

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