

ORGANIC LIVING

Made Simple



Organic Living

There's a debate that's been going on for many years now. Is organic living, and in particular, organic food, better for your health and the environment than non-organic? Is it worth the extra costs?

Over a hundred years ago, pesticides, hormone growth additives or chemical fertilizers weren't around. We didn't find them in our food. People ate vegetables and fruit as well as animal meat that didn't come from ground filled with pesticides or growth hormones. The foods weren't processed and packaged for a long shelf life.

Very few people can read food labels and understand the ingredients that are in their favorite products. We simply trust that the products which manufacturers and factory farms are advertising are good for us.

The same can be said for many other man-made products including fabrics, skincare and personal care products and cleaning aids.

Skincare and personal care products are often made with carcinogens (that is, cancer causing agents) and other toxic ingredients. Cleaning products often have ingredients that can be harmful to your health and your environment.

There are alternatives to most of the commercial products that contain these harmful compounds. Consumers can use natural ingredients the way their ancestors did to clean their homes and their bodies, and to feed their hunger.

Organic food can be healthier and appeal to consumers in an ethical way as well. In fact, nearly a quarter of American shoppers buy organic products at least once a week. Sales of organic foods have risen over 20% since 2005, and continue to rise every year.



Here are a few statistics to consider:

- Most household products contain toxic substances. Chemicals in household cleaners are three times more likely to cause cancer than air pollution. (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
- "The average American uses 25 gallons of toxic, hazardous chemical products every year in the home." (Prosperity Without Pollution, by Joel S. Hirschorn and Kirsten V. Oldenburg, 1991)
- "Women who work at home have a 54% higher death rate from cancer than those who work away from home. The 15-year study concluded it was as a direct result of the much

higher exposure rate to toxic chemicals in common household products!” (Toronto Indoor Air Conference 1990)

Many people, though, believe organic products to be overpriced and therefore out of reach. There are ways and certain products that should be consumed organically. This report will discuss the reasons why organic living is important to your health and the environment, what organic living means, and tips for buying organic.

Why Organic Living is Important

Organic living is important to your health and the environment for many reasons. The chemicals found in many products cause long term damage to your health (including increasing the likelihood of cancer), and harm the environment by releasing pollutants to the air and water. Let's look closer at why organic living is important.

Health Benefits

1. Organic farming reduces exposure to pesticides and chemicals on the fruits and vegetables we consume, therefore reducing the cause of cancer and other long term health problems. Even when washed, not all of the harmful chemicals on traditionally farmed foods can be removed.

“More than one-third of all personal care products contain at least one ingredient linked to cancer.” (Environmental Working Group Skin Deep database)

2. Eating a diet of organic foods can keep you from eating foods that have to be irradiated. Irradiation is the process that helps reduce harmful bacteria, prevent spoilage and increases the shelf life of foods. But it also reduces the nutritional value of food.



3. Organic livestock have been fed a natural diet and raised in a humane and natural environment. They aren't given any contaminated grains, growth hormones or antibiotics. These conventional measures are normally given as a preventative measure because of poor hygienic conditions the animals live in.

4. Organic foods taste better. Studies have found that organic fruit tastes better than conventional fruit and has more health benefits. “Fruit and Soil Quality of Organic and Conventional Strawberry

Agroecosystems,” a study led by Washington State University Regents professor of soil science John Reganold, is one of the most comprehensive, persuasive studies yet to show the nutritional and environmental benefits of organic farming.” (Source:

<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0012346>)

The study found that organic farming in strawberries resulted in increased antioxidants, vitamin C, and total phenolics in the berries. Vitamin C from strawberries has been found to have a negative effect on cancer cell growth.

5. Eating organic strengthens your immune system and reduces the risks of cancer and heart disease.

6. Organic foods have been shown to help promote weight loss.

Environmental Benefits

1. Pesticides and chemicals sprayed on plants contaminate water, soil and the air. Organic growing contributes to improved soil quality. The use of natural organic compost and manure, as well as natural weed and pest control, amend the soil by replacing nutrients that are pulled out from farming.

2. Organic foods and other products promote a healthier, more sustainable use of natural resources. Modern farming methods that use excessive chemicals have led to the decline of soil fertility and an increase in blue-green algae in waterways. Organic farming, on the other hand, works to minimize damage



to the environment through the use of physical weed or natural weed control, and by using animal manure and composting (or green manure).

3. Buying organic lets you support your local economy and local farmers. You get fresher foods. You can get to know the farmer who provides the food. And buying local reduces pollution by not having to transport food across the country or even across the world.

4. Organic farming is friendlier to wildlife. Using organic methods supports a more natural ecology of plants and animals.

5. Organic products reduce the effects mass-produced goods have on our planet, reducing pollution from transportation, factories and products used in packaging.

6. An organic lifestyle can improve your child's exposure to hidden allergens found in our homes and foods.

Our health and our environment both benefit from living an organic lifestyle. The harmful effects of chemicals that cause cancer and other long term health problems can be reduced from organic foods, and our environment is returned to a more natural and healthy state when pesticides and chemicals are removed from our daily lives.

What Does Organic Living Mean

What does organic living really mean? To many it means using environmentally-friendly alternatives to harsh chemicals and fertilizers. It also means using natural products like organic cotton, linen and wool for clothing. It means incorporating native plants into your landscape and using what grows natural to your specific area.

- Organic living means using fresh ingredients instead of processed ones, consuming foods grown without pesticides, chemicals or antibiotics and growth hormones. It means foods that are grown and produced in their most natural state.
- Using natural or herbal remedies for common ailments is another way organic living shows itself. By reducing your dependence on industrially produced medicines for heartburn, headaches and upset stomach, and instead using herbs that our past generations depended on, you can help your body heal itself.
- Detoxifying the body is another aspect in organic living. Lemon juice taken at the first sign of a cold, for instance, reduces the symptoms. Drinking a four ounce glass of water with baking soda added can aid indigestion or upset stomach.
- Beyond food, organic living means using cleaning products that don't contain harsh chemicals. Every year people are injured or killed when they mix the wrong cleaning chemicals together. Ammonia and bleach should never be mixed, for instance. Soap and water is often the first choice for household cleaning among those who live an organic lifestyle. Baking soda, vinegar and hydrogen peroxide are all products that clean well but aren't harmful to you or the environment.
- Organic living means purchasing and using products that are all natural and made with organically grown fibers. For example, cotton fabric for clothing can be made from organically grown cotton.
- Body care plays a role in organic living as well. Many manufacturers produce shampoos, lotions and other body care products that contain petrochemicals. There are many other chemicals to avoid in body care including Sodium Lauryl Sulfate. This is a substance found in shampoos for cleaning and foam building. It can cause eye irritation, skin rash, hair loss and allergic reactions. You can find a list of harmful chemicals that are often added to these types of products at: organicconsumers.org.
- Organic living means using products that won't harm the body or the environment either now or in the long term.



Living an organic lifestyle does take time and knowledge. You have to learn to read labels and learn what those labels mean. It means doing away with chemicals and other harmful man-made products and sometimes, spending a little more on a product.

Tips for Buying Organic

Buying organic is certainly beneficial, but you might be scared off by the cost. And do you really know which foods are most beneficial for you to buy as organic? In this section, we'll take a look at cost effective ways of affording organic foods, and which ones you should really be purchasing.

Affording organic food

Organic food is often higher in price than conventional food, but there are many ways to offset the cost.

1. Join food coops and buying clubs.
2. Shop at local farmers markets and lower cost supermarkets that carry organic products, such as Trader Joe's and Sprouts Farmers Market.
3. Join a Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSA's) where you purchase "shares" of produce in bulk from local farms.
4. Grow your own vegetables.
5. Buy in season.
6. Shop around; compare prices at grocery stores, farmers markets and other places.
7. Shop smart by reading labels. Fish, for instance, is never organic.
8. Cook from scratch. Buying whole ingredients is cheaper than packaged foods.
9. Look for coupons. Search for "organic" at one of these sites: shopnatureoasis.com or couponmom.com.
10. Shop online. You might be able to find the organic foods you want online. Begin with the GreenPeople.org directory.



For a downloadable pocket guide to reducing pesticide exposure (so you can take it along with you when you shop), log on to organic-center.org.

Which foods are most important organically?

According to [Dr. Andrew Weil](#), this is the “Dirty Dozen Plus” of produce that have the highest pesticide load. It’s important to buy the organic version whenever possible:

- Apples
- Strawberries
- Grapes
- Celery
- Peaches
- Spinach
- Sweet bell peppers
- Nectarines
- Cucumbers
- Potatoes
- Cherry tomatoes
- Hot peppers



Tip: Generally, the thicker the skin, the less likely the food will have high pesticide levels. Soft or thin skinned foods, or foods where you generally eat the skin, should be organically grown.

Other foods that should be purchased organically include:

- Kale/collard greens
- Summer squash

Organic meat and dairy means:

- No antibiotics, hormones, or pesticides are given to the meat animals.
- Livestock are given all organic feed; feed that hasn’t been grown with pesticides or chemicals.
- Animals should be raised in clean housing, be able to graze on different types of pastures, and with a healthy diet.
- Livestock and milking cows must graze on green pasture for at least four months a year. Chickens should have either an enclosed area or be free-ranged so they have freedom of movement, fresh air, direct sunlight and access to the outside.

Buying organic can be more expensive but there are ways to reduce the costs while buying the most important organic foods for you and your family. Shop around and ask others where they find their organic products, and compare the prices of those different sources.

What does organic really mean

Organic is not the same as sustainable. Organic produce and other products are grown or manufactured without pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge or genetically modified organisms. Animals aren't raised with antibiotics or growth hormones. Determining what is organic is found on the labels of products. But they can be confusing.

Different types of organic

There are different types or levels of organic products, and the labels are required to print the appropriate level. Countries that include certified organic labels include the United States USDA certified, European Union, Australian Certified Organic, and Canadian Certified Organic Logo.



1. "100% Organic" means the product contains 100% USDA certified organic products. These products are allowed to use the USDA Organic Seal. An example would be 100% Organic Peach Juice.
2. "Organic" means a product contains at least 95% organic ingredients. The other five percent can be non-organic allowed ingredients. An example would be Organic Apple Juice.
3. "Made with organic ingredients" means the product contains at least 70% organic ingredients. The remaining 30% can be non-organic allowed ingredients or even non-organic agricultural ingredients. An example is fruit punch made with organic apples and strawberries.
4. "GM-Free" means free of genetically-modified ingredients.
5. "All-Natural" means it doesn't contain synthetic or artificial ingredients (flavors, colors, chemical preservatives).
6. "Free-range" refers to poultry that have access to the outside.
7. "Certified Humane" means the animal was raised in humanely with ample space, shelter, fresh water and feed. The feed has no added hormones or antibiotics, from birth through slaughter.
8. "Grass-Fed" means the animals are pasture raised and free roaming. Although not certified organic, grass fed can often be healthier than organic beef.
9. "Cage-Free" means the animal was raised in healthy conditions.

10. "Hormone-Free" refers to dairy products raised without synthetic hormones.

What do the labels mean?

You can find a great label tool on the <http://www.greenerchoices.org/eco-labels/> site to help you decode food labels.

Organic facts:

- Organic products are those that are grown without the use of pesticides, fungicides or chemical fertilizers.
- The land for growing organic foods must be free of prohibited substances for at least three years. Prohibitive substances include chemicals such as sodium nitrate and tobacco dust. The complete list can be found at the electronic Code of Federal Regulations site. (<http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?rgn=div5&node=7:3.1.1.9.32>)
- Organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy should be from animals that have not been given antibiotics or growth hormones.



What's Happens Next

Organic living is not just about the types of food you consume. It's about a lifestyle of being aware of what is in the products you use and put into your body every day. Organic foods provide a host of benefits. Studies have shown that organic foods have more beneficial nutrients, including antioxidants than those grown conventionally. Organic products have been shown to help reduce the symptoms of allergies due to chemicals and preservatives in foods and other products.

Organic living, and in particular organic food, has become very popular in the last few years. But navigating the maze of the food labels, the benefits and the claims can be confusing. Is organic food healthier? Yes, in many ways it is. Is it more nutritious? Yes, most organic food contains higher levels of healthy nutrients than conventionally produced food. Are organic products better for the environment? In most cases yes, because less pollutants are created from the transportation and manufacturing processes. The water quality improves as well, since there is less run off of harmful chemicals and pesticides into streams, rivers and oceans.

It's up to you, the consumer, to read the labels and to learn about where you can find organic foods in your area. Spend time at your local farmers markets getting to know the farmers and how they produce their food.

Organic products might cost more than conventional products, but in the long run they can be cheaper – cheaper because you will be healthier, with less dependency on modern pharmaceuticals. Organic foods can be comparable in price when you use some of the strategies found in this report as well.