

ORGANIC FOODS

Nutrition

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Organic is often associated with a food being healthier or in some way superior. While, in some instances this may be true, it is not always so it is best to understand organic as it pertains to specific foods in order to make the best decisions.

Fruit and Vegetables

If you are looking to stay away from pesticides and GMOs then buying organic produce is best. If you are shopping and uncertain, look at the labels, organic produce will have a 5-digit code starting with the number 9. Its also most often labeled organic (genetically modified codes are also 5 digits but start with an 8 and conventional produce has a 4-digit code, starting with 3 or 4).

To help fit organic produce into your budget, reference the Environmental Working Group's Guide to Pesticide in Produce (The Dirty Dozen and Clean 15 <http://www.ewg.org/foodnews/>). Furthermore, look to local markets to find organic seasonal produce. Speak with the farmer, small farms might not be certified organic but many still practice by the standards. When these foods are out of season, turn to the frozen section to find organic produce that will likely be easier on your budget.

Meats

Organic meat comes from the following:

- Animals raised on organic pastures
- Certified organic feed for entire life
- Not routinely given drugs, antibiotics or growth hormones
- Year-round outdoor access

Consider choosing organic meat or poultry ingestion of antibiotics and risk of food-borne illness. If you have budget concerns, offset the additional cost by using smaller quantity less frequently. Supplement with plant-based protein sources.

Dairy

Growth hormone (rGBH) is frequently given to dairy cows in US. Other industrialized nations prohibit the use of rGBH. Organic milk is rGBH free and antibiotic free. It also complies to all organic live stock standards. Although there is not research that confirms the amount that is actually transmitted, if you use dairy regularly, selecting organic dairy products might be worth the investment.

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Fish

Organic fish is actually farm raised fish. So, with fish its best to select “wild” versus “organic”. Many heart studies suggest to eat 2 fish meals per week, preferably fatty fish. Keep in mind that small fish low on food chain have least exposure to chemicals.

If you are looking for information on various fish species, the Monterey Bay Aquarium “Best of the Best List is a great resource for sustainability.

Organic Grains

Similar to produce, organic grains are grown without pesticides. There are numerous chemical pesticides used in the conventional production of wheat. This results in greater yield from the crop but proponents of organic grains contend that these products are nutritionally inferior and might alter the crops vitamin, mineral and antioxidant benefits.

Organic Packaged Foods

If you are looking to universally avoid synthetic dyes, chemical flavorings, food additives and gmo products, then organic packaged foods might be a consideration for your household. If a product is labeled organic, then 95% of ingredients must be organic. If a product says “made with organic foods” then 70% ingredients must be organic by law.

While it is a worthwhile consideration, even if for the synthetic food dyes alone, it is worth remembering that sugar, honey or maple syrup whether organic or conventional, all contribute excess calories with minimal nutritional value.

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