What does organic mean?

Organic foods are crops and livestock grown without any synthetic chemicals, hormones, antibiotic agents, genetic engineering, and irradiation in organic farms.
Organic vs. Natural

Natural does not mean organic. The term “natural” applies broadly to foods that are free of artificial colors, flavors, sweeteners, preservatives and ingredients that do not occur naturally in the foods. Natural meat and poultry must be minimally processed in a method that does not fundamentally change the raw product. However, organic refers not only to the food itself, but also to how it was produced. Only organic guarantees no toxic synthetic pesticide or chemical fertilizers are used in production, and no antibiotics or growth hormones are given to animals.

Eating a diet that is mainly from plants – whether they are organic or conventional – is what is recommended.

Organic vs. conventional

What is important is to eat fruits, vegetables, and other plant foods regardless of whether they are grown conventionally or organically. Aim for at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily. Vegetables, fruits, and whole grains should form the central part of a person’s diet, regardless of whether they are grown conventionally or organically. Since plant foods offer vitamins, minerals, fiber, and phytochemicals, these foods have been known as cancer-fighting foods. Also, replacing higher calorie foods with healthful plant foods can help with weight control, which can help protect against some cancers.

Although the primary motivation and concern for consumer’s purchasing of organic food is health, there is no evidence to show eating organic foods reduces the risk of cancer.
**Organic related marketing terms**

**Free range:** Producers must demonstrate to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) that the poultry has been allowed access to the outside.

**Certified:** “Certified” implies that the USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service and the Agriculture Marketing Service have officially evaluated a meat product.

**Natural:** A product containing no artificial ingredient or added color and only minimally processed (a process that does not fundamentally alter the raw product).

**No hormones (beef):** The term “no hormones administered” may be approved for use on the label of beef products if the producer can provide documentation showing no hormones have been used in raising the animals.

**No hormones (pork or poultry):** Hormones are not allowed in raising hogs or poultry. Therefore the claim “no hormones added” cannot be used on the labels of pork or poultry unless it is followed by a statement that says “Federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones.”

**No antibiotics (red meat and poultry):** The terms “no antibiotics added” may be used on labels for meat or poultry products if the animals were raised without antibiotics.
Should I eat only organic fruits and vegetables to avoid exposure to pesticides?

Some studies have shown that organic foods has a lower amount of pesticides, but research has not confirmed that lower amounts of pesticides are causally related to preventing certain diseases or conditions, including cancer.

Although eating organic foods reduces your risk of ingesting commercially produced pesticides and chemicals, there is not clear evidence to either support or refute eating organic foods to prevent cancer.

Although the primary motivation and concern for consumer's purchasing of organic food is health, there is no evidence to show eating organic foods reduces the risk of cancer.

If you choose organic, remember that organic foods contain exactly the same amount of calories, fat and sugar as conventional brands.

Tips for reducing pesticide residues

**Washing:** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that all fresh fruits and vegetables be thoroughly rinsed under running water rather than soaking or dunking to remove most surface residues along with dirt and bacterial contamination. They also advise against using soaps and detergents to wash produce since they contain chemicals not safe for human consumption.

**Peeling and trimming:** Discard the outer layers of leafy vegetables, such as lettuce or cabbage. Peeling fruits and vegetables such as apples, pears, potatoes, and carrots will help to remove the surface residues. Some fiber will be lost in peeling.

**Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables:** This will give you a better mix of nutrients and also reduce your potential exposure to a single pesticide.
References


Created by:

Pouneh Shamloufard, Dietetic Intern

Patient Food and Nutrition Services

300 N. Ingalls Street

NIB N18E20