

## Is Organic Produce Worth It?

*Learn why organic costs more and if it's better for you*

It's common these days to find shelves or refrigerators stocked with products with the USDA Organic label at the grocery store. Organic fruits and vegetables have become increasingly popular, even though they are usually more expensive than those grown with traditional methods.

But is it worth paying a higher price for foods labeled organic? That depends. It is usually a matter of weighing the pros and cons.

If you want the advantages of produce that is free of pesticides and has less antibiotic exposure, then it could be worth the additional expense. However, if you are on a budget, it may be wiser to purchase conventionally grown fruits and vegetables instead of going without entirely.

It's important to note that most Americans fail to get their [recommended fill of fruits and vegetables](#) in their diet, which is a contributing factor to growing rates of obesity, diabetes and other health issues. But nutritionally, organic and conventionally grown foods are about the same.

"Organic foods are not necessarily healthier in terms of nutrients," says [Arame Motazed, MD](#), a [family medicine physician](#) at [Scripps Coastal Medical Center Carlsbad](#). "Choosing organic versus conventionally grown won't make a significant difference in your health. What's important is including fruits and vegetables in your diet."

### What is organic food?

Foods certified as organic are produced in accordance with regulations that focus on the quality of the soil, the way animals are raised, methods of controlling pests and weeds and the use of additives. They cost more because organic food production is more expensive.

Organic farms are not allowed to use certain materials and methods, including:

- Synthetic fertilizers
- Radiation
- Sewage sludge as fertilizer
- Most synthetic pesticides
- Genetic technology

Organic food must contain 95% or more organic ingredients or materials to use the USDA Organic label.

Organic farming materials or methods may include:

- Plant waste, farm animal manure or compost for soil quality
- Mulch for weed control
- Insects or insect traps for pest control
- Certain natural pesticides

Additionally, for organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy, the animals must have not been given any antibiotics or growth hormones.

### **Organic vs. conventional produce**

Organically grown foods are better for the environment due to less heavy farming methods used, which cuts pollution, but there is no significant difference in terms of taste or nutritional value.

While organic foods reduce your exposure to pesticide residues, there is no conclusive evidence that they are better for your health. Traditional farms are also regulated, and only safe levels of pesticide residue are allowed in their products.

Some studies have shown small to moderate increases in some nutrients in organic produce, but more research is needed to prove they are better for your health.

### **Where to find organic food**

In addition to grocery stores, you can find organic produce at farmers markets at stands offering locally grown produce.

If you are on a [budget](#) but you care about pesticide levels in your food, you can turn to the [Environmental Working Group](#) for guidance. This nonprofit regularly makes public which conventionally grown fruits and vegetables contain the highest and lowest amounts of pesticides.

### **Dirty Dozen**

The Environmental Working Group annually releases a compilation of the 12 fruits and vegetables with the most pesticide residue, often referred to as the “Dirty Dozen.” For those worried about pesticide exposure, it may be a good idea to purchase organic versions of these items.

1. Strawberries
2. Spinach
3. Kale, collard and mustard greens
4. Peaches
5. Pears
6. Nectarines
7. Apples
8. Grapes
9. Bell and hot peppers
10. Cherries
11. Blueberries

12. Green beans

**Clean 15**

The Environmental Working Group has identified a list of 15 fruits and vegetables that have the lowest amount of pesticides, which is the opposite of their “Dirty Dozen” list. People may choose to buy organic or non-organic versions of these items.

1. Avocados
2. Sweet corn
3. Pineapples
4. Onions
5. Papaya
6. Sweet peas (frozen)
7. Asparagus
8. Honeydew melon
9. Kiwi
10. Cabbage
11. Mushrooms
12. Mangoes
13. Sweet potatoes
14. Watermelon
15. Carrots

“Realistically, you can incorporate both organic and conventional food in a healthy diet,” says Dr. Motazed. “If you have questions, talk to your primary care doctor.”