

Body Balance: Protect Your Body from Pollution with a Healthy Lifestyle

Picking out Produce: Organic and Conventional Foods

When shopping at the grocery store, there are many choices to make about which foods to purchase. Currently, one of the most popular food trends is eating organic produce. Organic produce is marked with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Organic label and is usually displayed in a separate section in the store. Pesticides are found in almost all foods, but there are some differences between how organic foods and regular or conventional foods are grown.

Make Half Your Plate Fruits and Vegetables

USDA MyPlate recommends half your plate be fruits and vegetables at every meal. Taking steps to reduce pesticide exposure, such as washing all produce, will help keep pollution in your body low. It is important to keep in mind that consuming fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables is more beneficial to than consuming no fruits or vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are rich in vitamins, minerals,

and phytonutrients. Consuming fruits and vegetables helps protect your body from both the negative effects of environmental pollution and dietary factors that promote chronic diseases, such as saturated and trans-fats.

What Are Conventional Foods?

If a food isn't organic, it is "conventional." This means it can be grown/raised using limited amounts of antibiotics, pesticides, or genetically modified organisms. The USDA regulates everything used on these foods. Only safe and approved treatments are allowed. Most food is conventional. Conventional foods are just as safe, healthy, and nutritious as organic foods.

What Is Organic?

"Organic" means the food has been grown with a separate set of standards. Organic food can be any kind of produce, meat,



or even processed food, like cereal or granola bars. “USDA Organic” is a certification that requires the food to have been inspected and tested to meet the USDA organic regulations. Conventional foods are also inspected and tested but have different standards than USDA Organic. Farmers, companies, and producers must pay an extra fee for the extra inspections. This is part of the reason why USDA Organic foods are usually more expensive. Foods with a USDA Organic label must meet the following conditions:

USDA Organic Regulations

- No genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

- No irradiation
- Production methods conserve natural resources
- Animals are fed organic feed
- Animals have year-round outdoor access
- Animals have never been treated with antibiotics
- Only approved pesticides are applied

Producers are required to use methods that conserve natural resources and are encouraged to grow different varieties of the same crop.

All about Pesticides

What is a pesticide?

Pesticides are substances that prevent or kill a pest. Pests can

be bugs, rodents, weeds, or even fungus. Some common pesticides used at home include weed killer, roach spray, and bug spray. In large-scale agriculture production, pesticides are usually applied to plants to prevent bugs and weeds from harming them.

Are pesticides safe?

Pesticides of all types that are used in the U.S. have been deemed safe. Scientists continue to study the immediate and long-term effect on health.

How can you reduce exposure to pesticides?

The government does approve pesticide use in low doses, ones which current research show



pose no health risk. Reduce pesticide exposure by washing produce thoroughly under running water. Soaps or washes advertised to remove pesticides aren't recommended. Research shows using just running water is best. Pesticide residue also collects in the fat of animals, so choosing low-fat meat and dairy products is recommended. Other tips include scrubbing with a soft or stiff brush while washing the fruit/vegetable; peeling tough skins, like those on potatoes and apples, after washing; removing the outer leaves or layers, like on onions and lettuce heads; and trimming and discarding fatty portions of meat. When using pesticides on lawns and home gardens, make sure to read and follow the directions for use. Use protective clothing and make others aware of the area pesticides are applied to, so they can avoid contact and reduce their exposure.

Summary

No matter what type of produce you pick, fruits and vegetables are a healthy choice and can have many benefits. USDA MyPlate recommends half your plate be fruits and vegetables at every meal. Produce sold at grocery stores must meet USDA standards including pesticide levels. Washing produce with water and choosing low-fat meat and dairy products can help reduce exposure to pesticides. The University of Kentucky is a participant in the Superfund Research Center (SRC), which conducts ongoing research on the effects of pollutants and hazardous chemicals on the environment and on the body. For more information, see Inter-Program (IP) publications 76 and 77. Good nutrition is one of our best defenses for staying healthy, even in the presence of environmental pollutants.

References

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