

What does ORGANIC REALLY MEAN?

Eva Killeen from the College of Naturopathic Medicine (CNM) has all the answers...



Once upon a time, all food was organic. It was only during the 20th century that chemical pesticides, herbicides, hormones, antibiotics, irradiation and other 'novel' food processing techniques, as well as genetically modified organisms were introduced into our food supply. Since then, by coincidence or not, the number of people experiencing conditions such as asthma, allergies, eczema, migraines, fatigue, cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, depression, digestive and behavioural disorders and dementia has increased exponentially.

Manufacturers argue that the chemical ingredients added to our food are used in such small quantities that they pose no risk to our health, but what are the long term consequences of exposure to these toxins from multiple sources every day, starting in the womb? There are few truly independent studies and for some the debate continues: is organic food a life-saver, or just an expensive scam? Understandably, consumers are wary of spending more for a seemingly identical product.

Not that long ago everything was organic

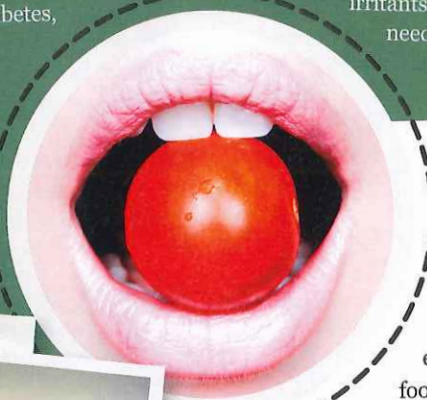


But what is the real difference between organic and non-organic food? With organic, you're not paying more to get more, you're paying more to get less – fewer pesticides, fewer herbicides, fewer hormones, fewer antibiotics, no irradiation and no GM: substances and practices implicated in disrupting normal body functions, resulting in disease, allergies, chronic conditions, infertility, depression and metabolic syndrome. Choosing organic benefits your health, the local economy and the environment.



1 It's the nutritional value
It's official! Eating fresh, organic, unprocessed food delivers superior nutritional value. According to studies cited by the Soil Association, organically produced crops (cereals, fruit and veg) contain up to 68% more antioxidants than non-organic. They also report that organic fruit and veg contain lower concentrations of pesticides and the toxic heavy metal cadmium.

Understanding nutrition as the cornerstone of health, and the therapeutic power of whole and organic foods, is the basis of what CNM teach on their diploma courses. Students learn that eating unadulterated food is fundamental to increasing wellness and vitality. Dramatic improvements in health are possible when irritants are reduced and nutritional needs met.



2 It's only natural
Our bodies have evolved over millennia eating natural, nourishing foods that sustain us and boost our resistance to disease. Our intestinal microflora is a complex ecosystem, vital for digestion and immunity. Pesticides, genetic modification and herbicides disrupt the digestive system's balance. Studies suggest links between the health of our intestinal microflora and various cancers, autoimmune conditions and dementia. Suffice to say that gut health affects everything from our mood to weight, so it pays to take care of it.



3 It's liver support
A 12-year German study found that organic food contains higher levels of minerals. The largest differences were for potassium and iron, but magnesium, calcium, phosphorus and vitamin C levels were also higher in organic vegetables. These minerals are vital for the body's detoxification process.

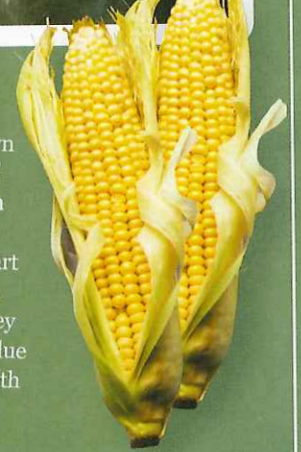
Eating organic food can help decrease the burden on our liver, the organ which works hard at reducing toxic load when we consume non-organic produce loaded with pesticides and other potentially harmful substances.

Organic foods are cleaner and safer than intensively farmed crops where the use of pesticides, food additives, chemical growth enhancers and synthetic hormones have lower health safety margins.



4 It's quality
A British study found that organically grown foods contain 'significantly' higher levels of antioxidants than the conventionally grown varieties, including beneficial compounds linked to a reduced risk of chronic diseases, such as heart and neurodegenerative diseases, and certain cancers. A Hungarian study reached a similar conclusion when they compared the chemical composition and nutritional value of organically and conventionally grown plant foods, with the organic variety again coming out on top.

According to these studies, organic crops contain a significantly higher amount of certain antioxidants, namely vitamin C, polyphenols, flavonoids and minerals. Moreover, there is a lower level of heavy metal contamination in organic crops compared to conventional ones. As a result, the risk of diseases caused by contaminated food is significantly reduced.



YOUR EXPERT
Nutritional Therapist Eva Killeen directs the CNM Vegan Natural Chef Diploma Course at the College of Naturopathic Medicine. naturopathy-uk.com/naturalchef



5 It's sustainable
Food being shipped all around the world leads to a big carbon footprint for just a little box of garlic, for example. Rich Pirog of the Leopold Centre for Sustainable Agriculture reports that the average fresh food item on our dinner table travels 1,500 miles to get there. Choosing to buy organic food from local sources eliminates the need for all that fuel-intensive transportation. When possible, select fruit and veg farmers who follow organic and sustainable farming practices to minimise your food's environmental impact.

Buying local is becoming more significant to a sustainable future. With a shorter trip from 'farm to plate', organic produce not only supports local growers, it is a key way to protect not only the vitamin and mineral content of our food, but the flavour too. Some of CNM's students train to become Natural Chefs so they can create delicious gourmet meals appropriate to the health of the diner with mainly locally sourced produce. They quickly learn the importance of establishing relations with suppliers and growers who aren't constrained by issues such as shelf-life limits.

As a bonus, by supporting a local farmer today, you are making sure there will be farms in your community tomorrow. This is vital for food security, especially with an uncertain energy future and our reliance on fossil fuels to produce, package, transport and store food.

The naturopathic approach to health is based on giving our bodies the best chance of thriving or healing by harnessing the power of nature. This goes beyond food to encompass everything from the water we drink, to the air we breathe. A healthy environment is key, so we strongly support the lower levels of environmental toxins, sustainable land management and the ecological diversity organic farming delivers.

