

# The Pros and Cons of Buying Organic Food

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If you can afford organic food, it may be better for your kids as well as for our environment.

## What Makes a Food Organic?

Organic is a term that identifies how farmers grow and process produce, dairy products, and meat. Farmers who practice organic methods don't use chemicals to fertilize, control weeds, or prevent diseases. Instead they use more natural approaches that help to nurture the soil.

## Is Organic Food More Nutritious for Kids?

"It's up for debate," says Samantha Heller, MS, RD, former senior clinical nutritionist at New York University Langone Medical Center. "There is some preliminary information that perhaps organic has some higher levels of nutrition. Others are saying not so much."

According to Heller, the nutritional value often depends on the distance and time it takes to ship the food. "If you live in New York and buy an apple from Washington State, it won't be as fresh and nutritious as an apple picked in New York State," explains Heller. "What's better is if you can find a local farmer who grows organic."

Another problem is the cost of buying all organic. "If you look at the vast majority of people in this country, we are all struggling financially," she adds. "So making a hard recommendation about whether to buy all organic for kids is not realistic."

If you can afford it, Heller recommends at least buying organic dairy, poultry, and produce.

## Buying Organic Food: The Pros and Cons

Here are other considerations as you debate the merits of organic vs. conventional food:

The Pros:

- **Organic farmers are helping save the planet.** That's a big reason why people may choose to buy organic food. Organic farmers produce food in ways that are intended to benefit the environment, reduce pollution, and conserve soil and water.

- **Most conventional farmers use pesticides.** Washing or peeling the skin of fruits and vegetables can help get rid of pesticides, but it may also decrease the nutrition and fiber found in the otherwise edible peels. Some people choose organic food to completely avoid these chemicals. (Experts currently agree that the small amount of pesticides found on produce is harmless.)

The Cons:

- **Organic food costs more.** Farming practices, such as mulching and weeding instead of spraying pesticides, are more expensive and the amount of food produced, called crop yields, is less.
- **Organic food doesn't always look as perfect.** Since organic food is not treated with preservatives or sprayed with wax to extend shelf life, the vegetables and fruit may be somewhat oddly shaped.

Heller says. "Be as thoughtful as you can and focus more on buying locally produced food, which is always the best option."

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