
Pesticides & Your Food

Tips on organic vs. non-organic, & washing your produce

Pesticides in Our Food

Is it important to avoid pesticides in food? Pesticides (and herbicides) are chemicals sprayed on food that help farms keep insects, pests and weeds away thereby increasing their crop yields. These chemicals, however, have deleterious effects on human health. Their direct toxicity is not even remotely debated, hence the astronaut spacesuit-looking gear that has to be worn by those who are applying these chemicals to the plants. But, the industry likes to deny the well-established fact that even low levels of pesticide residues, when consumed over a long period of time make our cells sick and contribute to numerous diseases - hormone imbalances, diabetes, neurodegenerative diseases like Parkinson's, various cancers and obesity.

Yikes! How terrifying! Should everyone shop organic? This question is actually harder to answer than it should be because one needs to keep *context* in mind. For example, most Americans eat far fewer fruits & vegetables than their health requires if they are to heal from and prevent chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, diabetes and autoimmune disease. Consuming enough fruits & vegetables (produce), even conventionally-grown produce that contains pesticide residues, far outweighs the risks associated with pesticide exposure *when compared to not consuming enough* produce. So no matter what, you should focus on hitting your daily goals first and foremost rather than avoiding them out of concern about pesticide exposure.

The importance of ample fruits & vegetables in the diet no matter what is indeed undisputed. However, buying organic should still be heavily prioritized when possible. This is because even beyond their lack of pesticides, there are additional benefits to consuming organic produce. Organic fruits & vegetables contain higher levels of disease-fighting nutrients and antioxidants than their conventionally-grown cousins as well as greater balance of minerals due to the higher soil quality typical of organic growing. These additional benefits offered by organic foods guarantee a double-win for your health.

Buying organic is not always possible in many places, and when it is, it can be cost-prohibitive. This is where selective organic shopping can be very helpful. Each year, the Environmental Working Group (EWG) updates their list of worst foods to buy conventionally due to their pesticide content. This annually-published list, titled “the dirty dozen”, acts as a cheat sheet for the unprocessed foods you should try to purchase organically whenever possible as they will contain the most harm-causing chemicals.

Dirty Dozen (2020)

- Strawberries
- Spinach
- Kale
- Nectarines
- Apples
- Grapes
- Peaches
- Cherries
- Pears
- Tomatoes
- Celery
- Potatoes
- (Raisins)
- (chickpeas)

The EWG also publishes a list of fresh foods that have the lowest amount of pesticides in them when conventionally grown. This is a list from which you can confidently *not* buy organic to help you prioritize your dollars when grocery shopping. This annually-updated list is called “the clean 15”.

Clean 15 (2020)

- Avocados
- Sweet corn
- Pineapple
- Onion
- Papaya
- Sweet peas
- Eggplant
- Asparagus
- Cauliflower
- Cantaloupe
- Broccoli
- Mushrooms
- Cabbage
- Honeydew
- Kiwi

If you can't buy a particular food organic, you can reduce its pesticide residue by thoroughly washing it in homemade non-toxic cleaning solutions listed below. This will remove a hefty percentage of pesticides from the outer layers of the fresh food item. I tend to consider this fact when I'm grocery shopping and purchase organic the foods I cannot easily wash - like frozen berries.

What About Meat & Dairy?

Animal products also serve as a medium for these health-disrupting chemicals. Because "we are what we eat", eating the flesh or other fluid/tissue of an animal who ate pesticide-ridden feed means that we are in turn consuming those toxins. In fact, eating animal products can be *even worse* than eating conventional produce because animal tissue will contain years' worth of stored pesticides/pesticide metabolites that the animal consumed and stored over its lifetime. That means that in order to eat clean animals, one must consume organic animal product. However, organic does not mean that the animal was fed its natural food source. In fact, most organic animals continue to be fed corn and soy products - a completely unnatural, poorly digested food source resulting in an atypical and altered nutritional makeup. Wild game and pasture-raised animals (meaning they live their entire lives on pasture including right up until slaughter - "grass-fed & grass-finished") is ideal if you are a meat-eater, as this will indicate that the animal was not exposed to pesticides and it ate its natural food source.

Washing Produce

- Washing Produce w/ 10% Salt Water
- Washing Produce w/ 10% Vinegar Water
- Washing Produce w/ Baking Soda & Water Solution (100oz water to 1oz baking soda) soaked for 12-15 minutes

Examples of Washing by Food Type

- Leafy greens
 - salad spinner filled with water
 - add 1 tsp baking soda
 - soak for 1 minute
 - spin dry
- Mushrooms
 - Rinse under cold water
 - pat dry
- Other vegetables & smooth-skinned fruits
 - add to a large bowl of water
 - add 1 tsp baking soda
 - soak for 2 minutes
 - scrub with a brush
 - rinse
- Berries
 - Rinse under cold running water in a mesh strainer