

Organic Foods – Are They Better for You?



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Organic does not mean contaminant or pesticide-free.

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The current market for organic foods is driven, at least in part, by the consumer's perception that it is more nutritious and/or safer than conventional food. Consumers who purchase organic foods likely pay a premium for these products that range from 40-175% because they believe there is a difference in nutritional content (vitamins, minerals), and/or have less pesticide, microbial or other environmental contaminants. How much of this is actually true – is eating organic better for our health? Let's look at the evidence.

What exactly is 'organic'?

Organic farming is a way of producing foods without the use of certain pesticides, fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, antibiotics, and growth hormones. Farmers follow the principles of organic farming that emphasizes environmental sustainability and promotes building and maintaining healthy soil.

Many types of organic foods can be found in the market including fruits and vegetables, herbs, dairy, livestock, grains, and processed foods. However, only foods that bear the "Biologique Canada Organic" logo have been 'certified' (by an accredited certification body). Foods that are certified have met the standards set out by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) regarding how the product was grown. In addition, there are regulations for product labels as well.

What is 'free-range'?

Terms like 'free-run', 'free-range' and 'organic' can be confusing to consumers, so it is important to clarify what they actually mean. With respect to chicken, 'free-run' means that the chicken can run around freely and is not confined in a cage. In Canada, all chickens raised for human consumption fall into this category. 'Free-range' chickens are also free run except they are allowed outside for part of the day. 'Organic' chickens refer to chickens that consume a diet that is comprised of at least 80% organic ingredients. Otherwise, their diet is very similar to the one fed to regular chickens.

The national standards for organic agriculture are still in draft form.

Do organic foods contain pesticides and other environmental contaminants?

Because of the production method, organic foods should contain fewer chemical residues and other contaminants. However, because the level of toxicity of these contaminants is unknown, these points may not be as significant to our health as we think. Furthermore, the level of contamination of conventionally grown foods should already be well below acceptable limits.

Contrary to popular belief, what organic DOES NOT MEAN, is 'pesticide-free' or 'contamination free.' According to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, a number of natural pesticides are allowed, and the presence of contaminants (chemical and microbial) is also seen. Thus organic does not automatically mean contaminant or pesticide-free.

Are organic foods healthier for me?

There is currently no evidence to support or refute claims that organic food is healthier than conventionally grown foods. Studies have tried to determine if a nutritional value difference exists between the two types of foods, and while some studies have shown that there is, the evidence still remains inconclusive. One reason it has been so difficult to compare organic to non-organic foods is because there are many variables that can affect the results of a study. For example, the nutritional value between the two types of foods vary depending on factors such as harvest date, plant disease, storage conditions, seasonal variation, geographical location.



Ingredients: Whole Organic Yellow Corn, Expeller-Pressed Sunflower Oil, and Sea Salt.

| Nutrition Facts | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Serving Size 1 oz. | |
| Amount Per Serving | |
| Calories 140 | Calories from Fat 50 |
| % Daily Value* | |
| Total Fat 6g | 10% |
| Saturated Fat 0.5g | 3% |
| Trans Fat 0g | |
| Cholesterol 0mg | 0% |
| Sodium 100mg | 4% |
| Total Carbohydrate 19g | 6% |
| Dietary Fiber 1g | 6% |
| Sugars 0g | |
| Protein 2g | |
| Vitamin A 0% | Vitamin C 0% |
| Calcium 2% | Iron 2% |
| Vitamin E 10% | Thiamin 2% |
| Niacin 2% | Vitamin B6 4% |
| Phosphorus 4% | Magnesium 4% |

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

| | Calories: 2,000 | 2,500 |
|--------------------|-------------------|---------|
| Total Fat | Less than 65g | 80g |
| Sat Fat | Less than 20g | 25g |
| Cholesterol | Less than 300mg | 300mg |
| Sodium | Less than 2,400mg | 2,400mg |
| Total Carbohydrate | 300g | 375g |
| Dietary Fiber | 25g | 30g |

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Animal feeding experiments have been used to determine if animals who consume organic foods have better health and reproductive performance over animals that ate non-organic foods. The results showed that these factors are slightly improved when they are organically fed, but there is no evidence to show that the same effect occurs in humans.

Another point to note is regarding processed foods. There are many processed products that are organic, and although they may contain fewer additives, they are usually nutritionally very similar – the two Tostitos chip labels on the left hand side demonstrate this. Once the food is processed, many nutrients (fibre, vitamins and minerals) are lost and are replaced by high amounts of sugar, salt and saturated or trans fats. Thus, reducing the amount of processed foods in your diet, regardless of its source, can help you achieve better health.

Overall, it is important to remember that it is more important to make sure you get your daily recommended servings of foods from each food group than to worry about where your source of foods comes from. Our bodies need nutrients to grow and repair itself to stay in good health. In addition, our genetics, other dietary habits, and overall lifestyle are also important determinants of our likelihood of developing certain diseases and illnesses. Currently, the evidence that organic foods is inconclusive, but there is lots of evidence that eating a balanced diet can maintain and improve health, regardless of its source.

So next time you are out shopping and deciding between an organic product or a non-organic product, you should evaluate it based on its overall characteristics such as taste, nutritional value, quality, etc, and not just on the logo alone. Consuming organic foods should be a choice made based on other facts, such as farming principles and sustainability, than the belief that they are of better nutritional quality.



INGREDIENTS: Whole White Corn, Vegetable Oil (Contains One or More of the Following: Corn, Sunflower, or Soybean Oil), and Salt. No Preservatives.

| Nutrition Facts | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Serving Size 1 oz. | |
| Amount Per Serving | |
| Calories 140 | Calories from Fat 60 |
| % Daily Value* | |
| Total Fat 7g | 11% |
| Saturated Fat 1g | 5% |
| Trans Fat 0g | |
| Cholesterol 0mg | 0% |
| Sodium 120mg | 5% |
| Total Carbohydrate 19g | 6% |
| Dietary Fiber 1g | 5% |
| Sugars 0g | |
| Protein 2g | |
| Vitamin A 0% | Vitamin C 0% |
| Calcium 4% | Iron 2% |
| Vitamin E 4% | Niacin 2% |
| Vitamin B6 4% | Phosphorus 6% |

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

| | Calories: 2,000 | 2,500 |
|--------------------|-------------------|---------|
| Total Fat | Less than 65g | 80g |
| Sat Fat | Less than 20g | 25g |
| Cholesterol | Less than 300mg | 300mg |
| Sodium | Less than 2,400mg | 2,400mg |
| Total Carbohydrate | 300g | 375g |
| Dietary Fiber | 25g | 30g |

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

The Prostate Education & Research Centre



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Developed by: Diana Trang, BSc
Supervising dietitian: Meredith Cushing, RD, MS, MSHSE

For more information, please call (604) 875-5006.
Visit The Prostate Centre on the World Wide Web:

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