



Should You Choose Organic Foods?

Is buying organic really worth it? With concerns about pesticide residues, food safety, health, and cost, it can be difficult to decide. While questions about these issues are common, research consistently shows that the most important thing you can do for your health is to eat more fruits, vegetables, and other plant-based foods—whether organic or not.

In fact, studies reveal that not eating enough fruits and vegetables is one of the leading causes of early death worldwide. Avoiding conventional produce out of fear of pesticides can actually do more harm than good, because the benefits of eating more produce far outweigh the risks. Pesticide residues in conventional produce are strictly regulated for safety.

If you rely on the "Dirty Dozen" and "Clean Fifteen" lists to guide your choices, it's important to remember that eating fruits and vegetables—from either list—will still provide significant health benefits. If buying organic for certain items helps ease your concerns, it's a valid choice, but the key is to eat more fruits and vegetables overall. There's no question that diets high in produce (organic or not) significantly cut your risk of health conditions like heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

When it comes to meat, dairy, and eggs, organic options might make a bigger difference. Animals raised conventionally often eat feed treated with pesticides, which can build up in their fat, milk, and eggs—a process called bioaccumulation. Studies show that animal products can have higher levels of pesticide residues than plant foods. Choosing organic for meat and dairy can reduce your exposure, as organic farming doesn't allow synthetic pesticides in animal feed.

It's also important to remember that organic doesn't always mean healthier. For example, organic cookies or chips are still processed foods high in refined sugar and flour, which aren't health supporting. Junk food is junk food, even if it's organic.

Ultimately, the best thing you can do for your health is to eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and other whole plant foods. Organic options may offer some benefits, especially for meat and dairy, but the main goal should always be to eat more plants and less junk. If organic isn't within your budget, there are still responsible ways to reduce pesticide exposure, such as supporting farms that use Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which reduces pesticide use through alternative pest control methods. Another great option is growing your own produce, which gives you full control over what goes into your food. Both organic and IPM farming prioritize safety and environmental sustainability.

Bottom line:

- Focus on diet quality first. Prioritize eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole plant foods—whether organic or conventional—to reduce the risk of chronic diseases.
- Conventional produce is safe. The benefits of eating nutrient-rich produce far outweigh any potential risks from pesticide residues, which are strictly regulated.
- Organic doesn't always mean healthier. Organic junk food, such as cookies and chips, is still processed food and should be consumed in moderation.
- Choose organic animal products when possible. Meat, dairy, and eggs can concentrate pesticides due to bioaccumulation, so opting for organic may reduce your exposure.
- Don't let lists like the "Dirty Dozen" (a list of fruits and vegetables that tend to have higher pesticide residues) discourage you. Focus on increasing produce intake overall.
- Whether through organic, IPM, or your own backyard, supporting growers who prioritize minimal pesticide use benefits your health and the environment.

Sheet Pan Veggies and Chickpeas with Tahini Dressing



This easy, one-pan dish features colorful roasted vegetables and protein-rich chickpeas topped with a creamy tahini dressing. Whether using organic or conventional produce, this nutrient-dense meal is simple, delicious, and perfect for a busy weeknight.

Ingredients:

- 1 can (15 oz) chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 2 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 1 bell pepper (any color), sliced
- 1 zucchini, sliced
- 1 red onion, sliced
- 1 small head of broccoli, cut into florets
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp paprika
- 1/2 tsp cumin
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1/4 cup slivered almonds (optional for garnish)
- Fresh parsley or cilantro, chopped (optional for garnish)

For the Tahini Dressing:

- 2 tbsp tahini (sesame seed paste)
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp maple syrup or honey
- 1-2 tbsp water to thin (adjust for desired consistency)

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).
2. On a large baking sheet, toss the chickpeas, sweet potatoes, bell pepper, zucchini, red onion, and broccoli with olive oil, paprika, cumin, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Spread everything in a single layer to ensure even roasting.
3. Roast in the oven for 25-30 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender and slightly browned, stirring halfway through for even cooking.
4. While the vegetables roast, whisk together the tahini, lemon juice, maple syrup, and water in a small bowl to make the dressing.
5. Once the veggies and chickpeas are roasted, drizzle with the tahini dressing and toss to coat. Sprinkle with slivered almonds and fresh parsley or cilantro if desired. Serve the roasted veggies and chickpeas with warm whole wheat pita bread, brown rice, couscous, or quinoa.