



Why Organic Is Still Better

A study finds that organic food isn't more nutritious than conventional food, but it still has benefits.

"ORGANIC FOOD is no better than conventional." That was the gist of many headlines after a Stanford University study concluded recently that organic food is no more nutritious than conventional food. How the study was characterized by many major media outlets — including, at first, the *New York Times* — made it seem as if organic's lack of nutritional superiority was reason enough to stop buying organic food, which is often more expensive than conventional food. But that response overlooked why most people buy organic: not because it's more nutritious, but because it contains fewer chemicals shown by research to be harmful to human health and the environment. "Organic is about production methods; it was never about nutrients," says NYU nutrition professor Marion Nestle. To that end, the Stanford study did find organic produce to be 30 percent less likely to contain chemicals than conventional produce. (Toxin exposure also drops when you eat fruits and vegetables with the skin removed.) It also found conventional chicken and pork to be 33 percent more likely to be contaminated with antibiotic-resistant bacteria. "The media chose to focus on nutrition, which is not the driver for the organic consumer. The driver is avoiding pesticides, GMOs, antibiotics, hormones — that's why people buy organic. They buy it for what's *not* in it, rather than what's in it," says Christine Bushway of the Organic Trade Association, a member-based organization for organic purveyors and standards.

Despite the finding that organic food is no more nutritious, the Stanford researchers did conclude that organic milk has more omega-3 fats than conventional milk — and other studies suggest organic meat has more omega-3s, too. They also found that organic produce has more phenols, compounds believed to fight cancer.

While the study states that the chemical levels in conventional food are safe according to government standards, the research didn't investigate the long-term effects of pesticide exposure. Also, there are environmental benefits to buying organic. "It's a lot better for the planet since it's not drenched in toxic chemical pesticides," says Nestle. "While there isn't evidence — yet — that these pesticides are harmful to consumers at the low doses eaten, they are demonstrably harmful to farmworkers, so it is unlikely they are beneficial or benign." —SARAH TOLAND

Skin-Care Giant to Remove Toxins From All Products



Johnson & Johnson, the world's second-largest manufacturer of personal-care products like shampoo and moisturizers, announced it will remove chemicals associated with health risks from its products by 2016. The decision, which will affect brands like Aveeno and Neutrogena, is "a significant step toward reducing consumers' exposure to chemicals that could pose health risks," says Jason Rano, director of government affairs for the Environmental Working Group. Among the chemicals to go are parabens, phthalates, and formaldehyde-releasing preservatives, which have been linked to cancer, hormone disruption, and development problems in children. Rano hopes Johnson & Johnson's announcement will mark a turning point in the cosmetics

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