

Message from the Parish Nurses

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ORGANIC VS CONVENTIONAL GROWN FOODS

The interest in organic food products has been rising steadily over the recent years. Organic was once only found in health food stores and farmers markets, now it's a regular feature in most supermarkets. And that's created somewhat of a dilemma in the produce aisle. In one hand you hold an organically grown apple and in the other hand you hold a conventionally grown apple. Both apples are red, shiny, and firm. Both provide vitamins and fiber, and both are free of fat, sodium and cholesterol. Which should you choose? Get the facts before you shop.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ORGANIC AND CONVENTIONAL FOODS?

The main difference between organic and conventional foods is in the method used in growing the food on the farm.

Conventional Farming Materials or Practices May Include:

- Synthetic fertilizers to add nutrients to the soil
- Sewage sludge as fertilizer
- Synthetic pesticides for pest control
- Genetic engineering, used to improve disease or pest resistance, or to improve crop yields
- Antibiotic and growth hormones for livestock
- Factory farm-raised (grain-feed) animals

Organic Farming Materials or Practices May Include:

- Plant waste left on fields (green manure), livestock manure or compost to improve soil quality
- Plant rotation to preserve soil quality and interrupt cycles of pest or disease
- Cover crops that prevent erosion when parcels of land are not in use and to plow into soil for improving soil quality
- Mulch to control weeds
- Predatory insects traps to control pests
- Certain natural pesticides and a few synthetic pesticides approved for organic farming, used rarely and only as a last resort in coordination with a USDA organic certifying agent.

Organic Farming Practices for Livestock Include:

- Healthy living conditions and access to the outdoors
- Pasture feed for at least 30 percent of livestock's nutritional needs during grazing season

- Organic foods for animals
- No antibiotics (may be used if animal is sick and not responding to alternative treatment)
- Prohibits use of hormones

Organic Food: Is It Safer and More Nutritious?

According to the Mayo Clinic there is a growing body of evidence that shows some potential health benefits of organic foods when compared with conventionally grown foods. While these studies have shown differences in the food, there is limited information to draw conclusions about how these differences translate into overall health benefits.

Potential benefits Include:

- **Nutrients.** Studies have shown small to moderate increases in some nutrients in organic produce, The best evidence of a significant increase is in certain types of flavonoids, which have antioxidant properties.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids.** The feeding requirements for organic livestock farming, such as the primary use of grass and alfalfa for cattle, result in generally higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids, a kind of fat that is more heart healthy than other fats. These higher omega-3 fatty acids are found in organic meats, dairy, and eggs.
- **Toxic metal.** Cadmium is a toxic chemical naturally found in soil and absorbed by plants. Studies have shown significantly lower cadmium in organic grains, but not fruit and vegetables, when compared with conventionally grown crops. The lower cadmium levels in organic grains may be related to the ban on synthetic fertilizers in organic farming.
- **Pesticide residue.** Compared with conventionally grown produce, organically grown produce has lower detectable levels of pesticide residue. Organic produce may have residue because of some pesticides approved for organic farming or because of airborne pesticides from conventional farming. The difference in health outcomes are unclear because of safety regulations for maximum levels of residue allowed in conventional farming.
- **Bacteria.** Meats produced conventionally may have a higher occurrence of bacteria resistance to antibiotic treatment. The overall risk of bacterial contamination of organic food is the same as conventional foods.

By Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse

Source: Mayo Clinic - More information can be found at:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/organic-food>

<https://foodprint.org/eating-sustainably>

Visit: www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org for "Down Side to Organic Grown Foods" and "Food Safety Tips". Click on: Parish Health Newsletter

DOWN SIDE TO ORGANIC GROWN FOODS

The one down side to organic grown foods is the cost. Organic foods typically cost more than their conventional counterparts. Higher prices are due, in part, to more expensive farming practices.

FOOD SAFETY TIPS

Whether you choose to purchase totally organic grown foods or opt to mix organic and conventional grown foods, be sure to keep these tips in mind:

- **Select a variety of foods from a variety of sources.**

This will give you a better mix of nutrients and reduce your likelihood of exposure to a single pesticide.

- **Buy fruits and vegetables in season when possible.**

To get the freshest produce, ask your grocer what is in season or buy food from a health food store selling locally grown food and your local farmers market.

- **Read food labels carefully.** Just because a product says it's organic or contains organic ingredients doesn't necessarily mean it's a healthier alternative.

Some organic produce may still be high in sugar, salt, fat or calories.

- **Wash and scrub fresh fruits and vegetables**

thoroughly under water. Washing helps remove dirt, bacteria and traces of chemicals from the surface of fruits and vegetables, but not all pesticide residues can be removed by washing. Peeling fruits and vegetables can remove contaminants but may reduce nutrients.

Source: Mayo Clinic

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/organic-food>

My Note: When buying organic or gluten-free products know all your allergies. Read the labels carefully because it doesn't necessarily mean it is free of allergies you or your family member may have (such as: milk, eggs, wheat, soy, or nuts). Read labels each time you buy something because the brand you have always purchased may have changed ingredients.

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