

Organic foods: What's the difference?

Recent health news, page 8

SPRING 2010

Over the past 10 years, the demand for organic meats, breads, dairy products, produce, and snacks has risen nearly 500 percent, but why? Although many believe organic foods to be more nutritious, recent studies have shown them to be equal to their non-organic counterparts when it comes to nutritional value. There are, however, many other benefits of eating organic products, both for you and the environment.

- **Insecticide free.** Instead of relying on synthetic pesticides, insecticides, and other artificial repellents, organic farmers use birds, other insects, and natural techniques to keep produce free of unwanted insects. These natural methods help keep the soil healthy, too.
- **Chemical free.** Organic produce is grown in soil that has been treated only with natural fertilizers, such as compost and manure, and natural weed killers, such as vinegar.
- **Naturally raised animals.** Livestock on organic farms are raised without growth hormones and antibiotics, and their feed is comprised of the same foods they would eat in a natural setting, such as grasses, whole grains, and corn.
- **Taste.** There haven't been any scientific tests to prove it, but many polls suggest organic foods just taste better.

So where can you find organic foods near you? There are three primary ways to find organic products: local farmers' markets, specialty food stores, and supermarkets. Unlike retail stores and supermarkets, however, produce brought to farmers' markets cannot be certified "organic" by the USDA. So while they are a great way to meet farmers and get the freshest possible produce, don't be afraid to ask how their products were grown or raised. Most will be happy to talk to you, and by supporting them, you'll be contributing directly to your local economy.

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Organic food labels

The United States Department of Agriculture established the following guidelines to help consumers identify organic products:

Single ingredient foods

Look for a small sticker version of the USDA Organic label or check the signage around the product for this seal.

Multi ingredient foods

Foods such as beverages, breads, and other processed foods use the following classification system to indicate their use of organic ingredients.

100% Organic—Foods bearing this label are made with 100% organic ingredients (excluding salt and water) and may display the USDA Organic seal.

Organic—These products contain at least 95–99% organic ingredients (by weight). These products may display the USDA Organic seal.

Made with organic ingredients—Food packaging that reads "Made With Organic Ingredients" must contain 70–94% organic ingredients. These products will not bear the USDA Organic seal; instead, they may list up to three ingredients on the front of the packaging.



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THE WorkCare GROUP, INC.
Integrated solutions for optimizing employee health and productivity

Staying healthy in an online world

In today's Web-heavy world, it can be easy to get caught up in online networks, games, blogs, and other social media. Keeping up with all these new social outlets can be challenging, and sometimes we end up replacing our healthy behaviors with more time online.

Here are some ideas to help you keep up with your online friends and your real world health.

- **Balance.** There's nothing wrong with keeping up with your friends online, but try to balance your online relationships with your real world ones. If you find yourself getting consumed with your online friends, consider taking a vacation from your computer, at least while you're at home.
- **Stay physically active.** It may not be difficult to find a reason to stay by your computer, but try to keep up with your regular physical activity. Spring is a great time to get outdoors and have fun!
- **Reconnect in real life too.** Some of your old friends may be far away, but if you've found any that live close by, don't limit yourselves to the Internet.

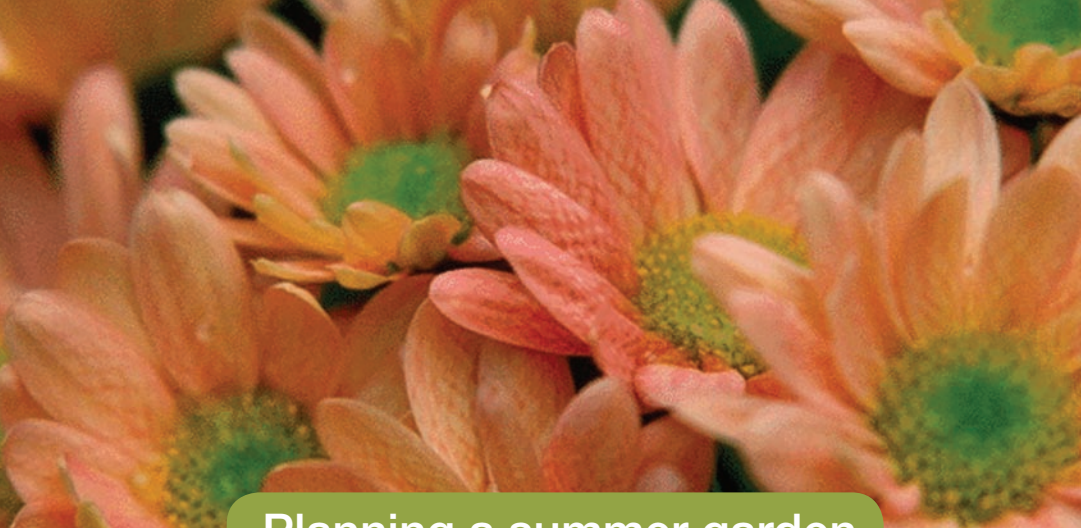


- **Beware of depression and isolation.** It's easy to become isolated if you spend too much time away from other people. If you find yourself feeling isolated or depressed, try to look for ways to get out of the house and spend time with those around you (e.g., joining a local sports club, volunteering).
- **Enjoy the sunshine.** Natural sunlight is a critical source of vitamin D, and it helps counteract the symptoms of depression. If it's been awhile since you've gone out into the sun because of your online habits, try to take a break and enjoy the great outdoors.
- **Use social media to coordinate real activities.** Online social networks are great for planning and organizing real events. Consider tapping into your list of virtual friends and planning a day trip or evening out on the town.
- **Give your eyes a break.** Research has shown that staring at a computer screen for a long period of time can damage your eyes. At a minimum, try to take a 5–10 minute break every hour so your eyes can readjust and refocus.

Healthy snacks at work

Many people think of snacks as “junk” food. In truth, all snacks are not bad. It's what you eat and how much, not how often you eat, that can be harmful. When you're selecting a packaged food item, consider the following:

- **How many servings?** If the package contains two or three servings and you generally eat the entire package, for instance, then you will need to multiply the number of calories (or grams of fat) listed by the number of servings.
- **What comes first?** Ingredients are listed in order of concentration, beginning with the ingredient in the largest quantity by weight. If the first four ingredients of a fruit drink are types of sugars, then it contains more sugar than fruit juice.
- **Tradeoffs.** If you select a food that is high in salt or fat, make other selections that are low in fat or salt for the rest of the day.
- **It's in the can.** Select caffeine- and sugar-free versions of your favorite soda. Better yet, drink 100 percent fruit/vegetable juices.
- **Snack machines.** If the following selections aren't available, ask your supplier to stock them:
 - sugarless mints and/or chewing gum
 - fat-free microwave popcorn
 - unsalted peanuts or dried fruits (e.g., raisins, prunes)
 - pretzels
 - fig or oatmeal cookies, vanilla wafers, ginger snaps
 - low-fat yogurt
- **Watch the fat.** Palm, coconut, or other tropical oil ingredients are high in saturated fat, which increases your risk for heart disease. Also, avoid foods with hydrogenated oils (trans fats).



Planning a summer garden

Tending a garden is a great way to beautify your yard and add value to your home, but even more than that, it's an easy way to get some daily exercise and relieve stress.

Regardless of what you want to plant, here are some tips for making sure you have a happy and healthy summer garden:

- **Think about sunlight.** Where in your yard is the sun the brightest? Believe it or not, some plants are very sensitive to sunlight and do best when they are placed in certain areas of the yard. When buying a new plant, look for a tag that describes the ideal amount of sunlight the plant should receive, then find a place in your yard that fits.
- **How's your soil?** Some plants do fine wherever you put them, but some require a very specific type of soil to be successful. Try mixing your regular soil with a garden fertilizer (e.g., Bumper Crop®) or treating your soil with organic nutrients.
- **Rain run-off can be a problem.** If you are planning a garden in a sloped area, consider the effect of rain run-off. Your plants may receive too much water when at the bottom of a hill, and they may not receive enough at the top of a hill.
- **Consider your schedule.** Large gardens can require a great deal of time to nurture, so look ahead to your summer schedule and think about your time commitments, particularly on the weekends.
- **Don't overplant.** It can be tempting to fill your garden with dozens of baby plants, but be careful not to overdo it. Some plants, especially vegetables, can increase in size dramatically over the growing season, so make sure they won't crowd everything else out. Check the tag on your specific plant for details.
- **Try composting.** Homemade compost is a great way to make use of kitchen scraps (e.g., egg shells, carrot shavings, mushroom stalks) and feed your garden at the same time. Unused portions of fruits and vegetables can provide a wealth of nutrients. To start, shovel some of dirt or soil into a pile or container. Then add leaves, twigs, and your kitchen scraps and mix together. Leave the mixture outside, and over time, as you continue to add more soil and vegetable scraps, everything will break down in the soil. For even better results, add a few earthworms. Soon you'll have made your own nutritious plant food.

Safety on the trails

As the weather gets warmer, the allure of the great outdoors gets stronger. Before you decide to take your family back to your favorite hiking trail, consider these safety tips:

- Let a responsible person know your route and return time. Have that person contact help if you do not return within a reasonable time.
- Always hike with another person. Keep your hiking party together and stay on officially maintained trails. Always keep children in your sight when hiking—do not allow them to get ahead of you or fall behind.
- Carry a current trail map and know how to read it.
- Carry a small flashlight—even during the day. If you have trouble on the trail, darkness may fall before you can finish your hike.
- Take adequate water—minimum two quarts per person per day. All water obtained from the backcountry should be treated either by filtering or boiling.
- Carry a small first aid kit.
- Check the current weather forecast and be prepared for quickly changing conditions.
- Wear shoes or boots that provide good ankle support.
- Avoid hypothermia (the dangerous lowering of body temperature) by keeping dry. Avoid cotton clothing. Dress in layers that can be easily removed or added as you heat up or cool down. Always carry a wind-resistant jacket and rain gear—even on sunny days!

For more information about trail and outdoor safety, visit www.nps.gov.

Working a walk into your day

Whether you want to lose weight, manage stress, or reduce your health risks, walking is perhaps the best way to add regular exercise to your life, especially during the workday. Walking is inexpensive, requires little equipment, can be done almost anywhere, and is good for young and old alike.

Ideas that work

- **Use the proper footwear.** For most people, walking or jogging shoes offer enough support and cushioning. Be sure there's enough room—usually the width of your thumbnail—in the toe box to prevent your toes from becoming jammed. Also, if you're an older adult with balance problems, you may want to stick to shoes with thinner, harder soles for walking since the higher, softer soles of jogging or walking shoes may not give you as much stability.
- **Schedule your walk.** If you haven't had the time to exercise, schedule your walk and make it a habit. Do something for you.
- **Start slowly, then build.** To begin feeling health benefits, walk at least five days a week, for a total of 30 minutes per day. You may find that you can walk for only 10 minutes before needing a rest—that's OK. Three 10-minute walks spread out over the day are beneficial. Over time, add a few minutes to the length of your walk until you can walk for 30 minutes without stopping. A rule of thumb is that if you can carry on a normal conversation without being out of breath, then you are exercising at an acceptable level of effort.
- **Add variety.** Though it's wise to have a regular walking route, try to vary your walking course once you've reached a level of comfort and regularity. Map out additional safe walking routes that vary in distance, terrain, and scenery.
- **Buddy up.** You don't have to walk alone. Walk with a family member, friend, or co-worker. Ideally, try to walk with someone at your speed and level of fitness.



- **Form a walking group.** Members can alternate choosing the walking route. Establish an incentive program for your progress or set up an office or family walking fund. For every mile walked, contribute to the walking fund. Once the fund has reached a certain amount, treat yourself or the group to movie tickets or lunch at a local restaurant, or donate the money to charity.

Continuing your education online

Educations, diplomas, and degrees can be interrupted for a variety of reasons, but online classes can make it easier to finish what you started. Here are some tips to think about when choosing an online program:

- **Ask questions?** Try to find out about the instructor of the online class. Is he or she accredited in the subject of the class? What sort of education does he or she have? Will the teacher be available for questions and discussions—live or via e-mail?
- **Test time.** Many online classes allow you to take your tests at home, but some required proctored, or supervised, exams. If so, find out if you have a local proctor who is suitable.
- **Making the grade.** Ask yourself the following:
 - Is your selected school accredited with a state or local agency? If not, the quality of the classes offered may be questionable.
 - Can you transfer the credits? If your online class awards college credits, can they be transferred to another school or program if you desire?
 - What reputation does the school have in your area?
 - What resources does the school provide to online students? Would you be allowed to use the library or other on-campus facilities?
 - Does your company provide financial assistance for job-related courses?

Investing for life

Let's face it—the financial downturn of the last few years has contributed to sleepless nights and difficult financial decisions for many of us. However, the fact remains that financial health is critical to work and life effectiveness. Below are some key points for developing and executing a financial strategy—for life.

- **Consider your stage of life.** Each stage of life (e.g., first full-time job, starting a family, retiring) has different saving and investment goals and relative risks. It's important to consider your financial needs not only for today, but also into your future. Ask yourself, "What kind of life do I envision for myself in the future? What resources will I need to achieve it?"
- **Save and invest early.** Make saving and investing a habit. Better yet, have part of your paycheck electronically deposited to your savings or investment fund. The earlier in life you begin investing, the greater your opportunity for growth. Even if you start with a small amount, try to build to an investment goal of 10 percent (or more) of your monthly earnings.



- **Consider seeking professional help.** You may consider professional assistance in mapping out your long-term financial goals and risk tolerance, and developing a plan that will improve your chances of achieving what you want.
- **Do your research.** Learn basic investment fundamentals from various reputable sources. Becoming informed will help you in developing your personal financial plan and asking the right questions of a financial advisor. As your knowledge of investments increases, you will be able to determine whether your investments are on track to achieve your goals.
- **Spread your risks.** To avoid exposure to the ups and downs of the market, many financial experts recommend diversifying your portfolio by dividing your contributions into certain percentages and applying them across a number of investment types. For example, your portfolio may have a mix of stocks (equities), bonds, and money market (or cash) accounts. Younger and middle-aged individuals may be willing to invest more in equities than someone closer to retirement. In theory, stocks have a greater potential for return, but the risk for loss also is greater.

Respiratory protection

At work and at home, there are times when the air you breathe may not be clean or may be otherwise changed so that it can cause health problems. Respiratory hazards can be divided into four main categories:

1. **Dusts, fumes, and mists**
2. **Gases and vapors**
3. **Oxygen deficiency**
4. **Temperature extremes**

To help protect against poor quality air and other causes of respiratory problems, here are some ideas to consider.

- **If possible, ventilate.** Mechanically remove the air contaminant before turning to a respirator.
- **Use respiratory protection** specific to the conditions you're working in:

- A disposable mask covers your nose and mouth and traps airborne particles. It doesn't protect against oxygen deficiency, temperature extremes, or high concentrations of dusts, mists, or fumes.
- A purifying respirator can be full- or half-face using special filters. Each filter is made for a particular gas or vapor and can be identified by a color specific to that hazard. It doesn't protect against oxygen deficiency, temperature extremes, or hazards not listed on the label.

- An air-supplying respirator is used when there is an oxygen deficiency or temperature extreme. It can also protect you when there are extremely high concentrations of dusts, fumes, and vapors or if you are unable to wear a mask. It always includes a full-face mask, hood, or helmet, a separate air supply (either a portable tank or extendable air-line), and is only usable for limited period of time. This kind of respirator offers the highest level of protection.

First aid kit basics

They aren't often needed, but a well-stocked first aid kit can make all the difference in an emergency situation.

The following list will help you and your family stock your first aid kit. This list includes basic items for the treatment and relief of common medical problems. Before you proceed, take note of these recommendations:

- **Discard any over-the** or prescription medication that has passed its expiration date.
- **Discard medications and/or supplies** where the packaging has been damaged (e.g., by water) or shows signs of tampering (e.g., safety lid is missing or loose).

First aid kit check list:

- adhesive tape
- antibiotic ointment
- antihistamines (both oral and topical)
- aspirin and non-aspirin pain relievers*
- bandages (both self-adhesive and elastic wraps)
- instant cold packs
- cotton balls and cotton-tipped swabs
- disposable latex gloves
- duct tape
- emergency phone numbers for your family doctor, pediatrician, and regional poison control
- first aid manual
- gauze pads
- hand sanitizing gel
- hydrocortisone cream
- scissors
- sterile eyewash (saline solution)
- thermometer
- tweezers

*Because of the risk of Reye's syndrome, aspirin should not be given to or used by children or teenagers who have or are suspected of having flu or chicken pox. Use acetaminophen.

Locating eldercare services

As the American population ages, the number of services related to aging is growing, in both the public and private sectors. If you are faced with eldercare responsibilities, one of the first things you'll want to do is become aware of what services are available in the community. If you live in a large metropolitan area, you probably will have a greater chance of finding the services you need (although some may have a waiting list) than someone who lives in a less populated area.

● **Area Agency on Aging (AAA):**

AAAs were set up by an act of Congress. Today more than 650 regional AAAs provide a variety of services to older adults, either through direct programming or through the monitoring and funding of local providers. Although anyone age 60 and older has access to available services, older people who are socially or economically disadvantaged have first preference.

When you call your local AAA (refer to the "blue pages" of your phone book), the staff can refer you to sponsored programs and services in your region. These services may include adult daycare, housing services, nutrition services, visiting nurses, home-health aides, homemaker services, legal assistance, senior centers, respite services, and transportation assistance, to name just a few.

● **Information and Referral Services (I&Rs):** Primarily funded through the United Way of America, more than 400 I&Rs are available across the country to help individuals locate services related to aging in their communities. Look in your telephone directory's "Guide to Human Services," or in the yellow pages under "Social Service Organizations" for your local I&R.

● **Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** If your company offers an employee assistance program, your designated counselor may be able to help you locate eldercare services.

● **Company-sponsored eldercare services:** Some employers offer eldercare services as an employee benefit. In most cases, employees place a toll-free call to a professional counselor, who can provide information and referral assistance. Another service that may be provided is geriatric case management. The geriatric case manager can assist the employee in arranging an assessment of an older relative's needs and recommend and coordinate a care plan. This is especially helpful when employees live a long distance from their relatives.



When you become more active in making decisions that affect your medical care, you will have greater confidence and trust in your treatment plan.

What can I do for sinusitis?

Usually, sinusitis develops when a cold, allergy, or other respiratory irritation causes nasal membranes to become so swollen that mucus no longer can flow freely out of the sinuses. Pressure increases, mucus builds up, and blocked sinus cavities become a breeding ground for bacteria. Once an infection sets in, antibiotics usually are the only way to rid sinuses of infection completely.

Symptoms & signs

- Prolonged pressure or pain around the nose, forehead or cheeks, between and behind the eyes, or near the upper teeth
- Yellow or green nasal mucus that may develop a bad odor or taste
- Puffy eyelids
- Coughing or difficulty breathing
- Fever

Talk with your doctor if:

- You develop thick, yellow, or greenish nasal discharge or if cold and allergy symptoms do not improve after more than 1 week.
- You have pain over the eyebrow, or below the eye, or in the upper teeth—usually on one side of your face.
- You have a severe headache that is not relieved by aspirin or acetaminophen.

If physician referral is not recommended at this time,

Try HomeCare™:

Fluids

- Drink plenty of liquids, especially hot ones.
- Avoid drinks containing alcohol or caffeine.

Heat/Cold

- Apply warm compresses over your eyes and cheeks periodically to relieve pain.
- Twice a day, inhale steam in a hot shower or inhale steam from a sink of steaming water (drape a towel over your head to trap the steam).

Medication

- Use over-the-counter nasal decongestant sprays for no more than 3 days.
- Try an oral decongestant with pseudoephedrine to help clear nasal passages.
- Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen as needed for pain. Aspirin increases congestion in aspirin-sensitive individuals.
- Avoid antihistamines unless you have allergies that contribute to sinus inflammation.
- Try a saline nasal spray or nasal wash to help remove mucus.

Prevention

- Avoid or control airborne irritants and allergens that you know will trigger symptoms.
- Blow your nose gently to avoid forcing mucus into sinuses or inner ears.
- Keep your nose lubricated with saline sprays or petroleum jelly.
- Use an air filter in your bedroom.

All about chronic fatigue

Chronic fatigue syndrome, or CFS, is a complex condition that causes profound fatigue and a variety of other symptoms. Everyone with CFS experiences a dramatic decline in their activity level and stamina, but the course of CFS varies greatly from person to person, and symptoms may come and go over time. Common symptoms include:

- unexplained, severe, all-encompassing mental and physical fatigue lasting longer than 6 months and is not relieved by rest, and
- four or more of the following, present for longer than 6 months

- impaired memory or concentration
- extreme exhaustion and increase in symptoms after physical or mental exertion
- unrefreshing sleep
- muscle and joint pain
- headaches
- sore throat
- tender lymph nodes in the neck and underarm

Diagnosis and treatment

Doctors rely on conducting a complete physical exam, carefully listening to the explanation of symptoms, considering any

medications that could cause fatigue, and screening for depression and other mental health problems. The goals of treatment include managing pain and relieving symptoms, learning to cope with a debilitating chronic illness, and managing the extreme ups and downs of your energy levels.

Treatment may involve the following:

- Medications
- Professional counseling
- Alternative therapies
- Support groups
- Balanced diet and good nutrition
- Activity and exercise

Organic foods

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Growing organic produce at home is a great way to have fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the year at only a fraction of the cost. If you are planning an organic garden, look for soils, fertilizers, and other products that are specially marked as being organic.

Although there are several benefits to buying, eating, and supporting organic food, there is one potentially significant downside: cost. Due to the added effort and cost of producing and certifying organic foods, their average price tends to be 10 to 40 percent higher than similar non-organic foods. For this reason alone, buying from local markets and farmers is perhaps the best way to save, since there are no middlemen to pay and transportation costs are minimal.

Of course, one way to avoid these costs all together, at least on fruits and vegetables, is to plant your own organic garden. For tips on setting up your own garden, see page 2.

Health observances April—June

APRIL 1–30

National Cancer Control Month

American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org

APRIL 1–30

Foot Health Awareness Month

American Podiatric Medical Association
www.apma.org

MAY 1–31

American Stroke Month

American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org

MAY 1–31

Clean Air Month

American Lung Association
www.lungusa.org

MAY 1–31

National Arthritis Awareness Month

Arthritis Foundation
www.arthritis.org

JUNE 1–JULY 4

Fireworks Safety Month

Prevent Blindness America
www.preventblindness.org

JUNE 6–12

Sun Safety Week

Sun Safety Alliance
www.sunsafetyalliance.org

JUNE 14–22

National Men's Health Week

Men's Health Network
www.menshealthmonth.org

Recent health news and research

- **Leading a purposeful life may prevent Alzheimer's disease.** According to a new study published in the March issue of *Archives of General Psychiatry*, people who say their lives have a purpose are less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease or its precursor, mild cognitive impairment. Researchers collected data from 951 older people and determined that of those who had more purposeful, satisfying lives had a 2.4 times less likely to develop Alzheimer's.
- **Fitness may boost kids' grades.** A new study by researchers at West Virginia University found that across each of the four standard academic areas, a child who was fit in fifth grade and maintained his or her fitness through the seventh grade had the highest scores, on average, in standardized tests. For example, those who were unhealthy in fifth grade and remained so were the worst at reading, with an average reading score of 2.91 points (of a possible 5). However, students who were healthy and fit in both the fifth and seventh grades did the very best of all with an average reading score of 3.31.
- **Secondhand smoke starts damaging arteries in childhood.** A soon-to-be-published study from Finland indicates that kids exposed to secondhand smoke face a higher risk of developing early signs of clogged arteries by the time they're 13, and are also more likely to have other risk factors for heart disease. The study examined 494 children and found that those exposed to secondhand smoke between the ages of 8 and 13 were more likely to show thickening of blood vessel walls, a precursor to hardening—and eventually clogged—arteries.

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