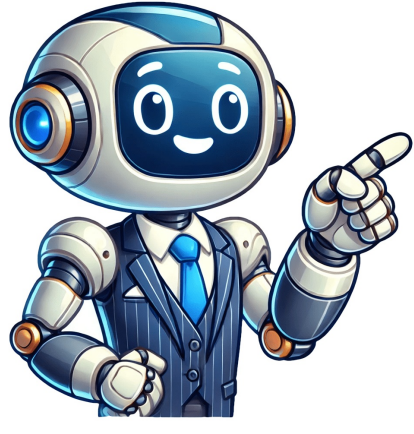


I'm not a robot



In recent years, organic food has become a buzzword in the health and wellness community. More consumers are turning to organic options, driven by a desire for healthier, more environmentally friendly food choices. There are lots and lots of reasons to eat organic food over non-organic, but it can be hard to distinguish just what exactly constitutes organic foods. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) admitted as much by updating its guidelines for organic food labeling in 2023. The USDA explained in a press release: "Today, the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) previewed the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) final rule. This update to the USDA organic regulations strengthens oversight and enforcement of the production, handling, and sale of organic products. This final rule implements 2018 Farm Bill mandates, responds to industry requests for updates to the USDA organic regulations, and addresses National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) recommendations. "Protecting and growing the organic sector and the trusted USDA organic seal is a key part of the USDA Food Systems Transformation initiative," said Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Jenny Lester Moffitt. The Strengthening Organic Enforcement rule is the biggest update to the organic regulations since the original Act in 1990, providing a significant increase in oversight and enforcement authority to reinforce the trust of consumers, farmers, and those transitioning to organic production. This success is another demonstration that USDA fully stands behind the organic brand." What exactly is organic food, and how does it differ from non-organic options? This article will explore the essential aspects of organic food, comparing it with non-organic alternatives, discussing its health benefits and providing tips on how to buy the best organic products. What Is Organic Food? Organic food is produced using methods that prioritize natural processes and ecological balance. The specific regulations vary by country, but in general, organic farming prohibits the use of synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and antibiotics in livestock. Organic farms often focus on regenerative agriculture practices like crop rotation, cover cropping and composting to maintain soil health and fertility. Organic foods production bans the use of: Chemical pesticides and herbicides Synthetic fertilizers Sewage sludge Ionizing radiation Bioengineering (GMOs) Antibiotics and growth hormones To earn the organic label, a government-approved certifier inspects the farm and approves the food product. This happens to make sure the grower is following the rules set in place by the United States Department of Agriculture. When it comes to organic farming, there are strict standards and inspections in place. Organic agriculture only permits the use of natural fertilizers like manure and compost. Other hallmark methods of organic farming include: Crop rotation Companion planting Natural pest control No GMOs Replenishing and maintaining soil fertility Promoting biodiversity Conserving water resources Reducing pollution The newest USDA guidelines for organic foods, which went into effect on March 20, 2023, include the following updates: Requiring certification of more of the businesses, like brokers and traders, at critical links in organic supply chains. Requiring NOP Import Certificates for all organic imports. Requiring organic identification on nonretail containers. Increasing authority for more rigorous on-site inspections of certified operations. Requiring uniform qualification and training standards for organic inspectors and certifying agent personnel. Requiring standardized certificates of organic verification. Requiring additional and more frequent reporting of data on certified operations. Creating authority for more robust traceability procedures and fraud prevention procedures. Specifying certification requirements for Organic Non-Organic The key difference between organic and non-organic food lies in the farming practices used. Non-organic farming often relies on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides to boost yields and control pests. Livestock raised non-organically may have given antibiotics to prevent disease and growth hormones to accelerate development. Here's more on organic vs. non-organic: Farming practices Organic farming uses natural fertilizers like compost and manure, crop rotation, and biological pest control methods. Non-organic farming, on the other hand, relies heavily on synthetic chemicals and industrial farming techniques to increase yield and control pests and diseases. Nutritional differences Some studies suggest that organic foods may contain higher levels of certain nutrients, such as antioxidants, vitamin C, iron, magnesium and phosphorus. Ad However, the differences are often minor and can vary based on various factors, including the type of food and farming practices used. Environmental impact Organic farming is generally better for the environment. It promotes biodiversity, reduces pollution from pesticides and fertilizers, and enhances soil fertility and structure. Non-organic farming, in contrast, can lead to soil degradation, water contamination and loss of wildlife habitats due to heavy chemical usage. Organic Foods and Cancer Prevention Research shows that when people switch from eating conventionally grown foods to more organic foods, concentrations of pesticide metabolites in urine decreases. Although we know that eating more organic foods and less conventionally grown foods will reduce the amount of pesticide residues in our bodies, what exactly does this mean for our health? In 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified three pesticides frequently used in agriculture as carcinogenic to humans. Yes, that means that, according to the IARC, glyphosate, malathion and diazinon are chemicals used on our food even though they may cause cancer in humans. Until recently, evidence supporting the carcinogenic effects of these pesticides was based only on occupational exposure, primarily in agricultural settings. What about low-level pesticide exposure in the general population, which primarily comes from the food we conventionally grow? That's the exact question that researchers in France sought to answer now with this study. It's official: Eating organic foods reduces your risk for developing cancer. Research from the Institut National du Santé et de la Recherche Médicale in France brings incredible news. That right, choosing organic foods over conventionally grown foods can reduce your risk of cancer by 25 percent. The concerning part? More than 90 percent of the U.S. population harbors detectable pesticides in their blood or urine. What does this mean for our future health? Well, for one thing, big companies that use and produce pesticides may have to start owning up to the data. Non-industry-funded research repeatedly links these chemicals to cancer. Another thing to consider? This French study comes on the heels of Environmental Working Group's testing that detected glyphosate in cereal. It appears that Monsanto's Roundup and other pesticides are downright dangerous for our health. The 2018 October study appeared in JAMA Internal Medicine. It examined the association between self-reported organic food intake and cancer risk. Researchers collected data on more than 68,900 French adults, with a mean age of 44 years, in order to establish their organic food consumption frequency and dietary intake. For 16 food products, including fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, fish, eggs and vegetables oils, the participants reported how often they chose organic over conventional options by selecting one of eight categories, including "never," "occasionally" and "most of the time." Based on an individual's self-report, researchers computed an "organic food score" and used it to estimate a person's risk of cancer. Study authors followed the participants for a mean of five years, analyzing the incidence of cancer during a follow-up assessment. Of the 68,946 volunteers, 1,340 developed cancer, including 459 cases of breast cancers, 180 prostate cancers, 135 skin cancers, 99 colorectal cancers, 47 non-Hodgkin's lymphomas and 15 other lymphomas. Researchers pointed out that among these types of cancer, individuals with a higher frequency of organic food consumption enjoyed a reduced risk for three specific cancer sites: postmenopausal breast cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and other lymphomas. According to researchers, eating a higher frequency of organic foods resulted in a 15 percent lower risk to have liver residues, and a 10 percent lower risk to have pesticide residues in their blood. Most of the organic food consumers in the study were women. The study also found that organic food consumers had a 25 percent lower risk of cancer than non-organic food consumers. The data suggests what's already suspected — that eating organic foods is likely better for human health — there are some drawbacks to this particular study that we need to address. One possible weakness of the study lies in the fact that organic food intake is notoriously difficult to assess. Eating at a restaurant, takeout spot or friend's house makes it more difficult to verify food sources, so there may be an issue of misclassification in some cases. Plus, not all conventional foods are equal. Some contain more pesticides (or more potent pesticides), and this study doesn't take this into account. If a study participant chose to go organic with all "Dirty Dozen" foods from EWG but went conventional for the rest, that's not considered here, either. Also, researchers admit that the follow-up time for this study was short. This may have limited the statistical data for some forms of cancer. Finally, people who did not choose to eat organically grown foods had the option to disclose their reasons for doing so. These included: Price barriers Limited availability Lack of interest All participants who did not choose organic foods, no matter the reason, were lumped into one category. This may be a drawback because people who lack interest in organic foods entirely may experience an overall more negative approach toward health, which could influence the results of the study. Other Health Benefits 1. Reduced pesticide exposure One of the primary health benefits of organic food is reduced exposure to harmful pesticides. Farmers grow certified organic produce without synthetic fertilizers, chemical pesticides, preservatives, genetic modification, sewage sludge or radiation. Conventional farming often uses synthetic pesticides, which can leave residues on food. Although these residues are generally within regulated safety limits, some people prefer to avoid them altogether by choosing organic options given they are associated with harmful effects. Organic foods are better for the environment. Organic farms don't pollute soil and nearby waters with harmful and toxic chemicals. 2. Better animal welfare Many people who choose organic food also care about the welfare of the animals that provide the food. Organic livestock production is to use materials and practices that enhance the ecological balance of natural systems and that integrate the farm with the surrounding environment. This means that organic farms provide better living conditions for animals, which may translate to healthier meat and dairy products. 3. Potentially improved nutrient content Some studies suggest that organic fruits and vegetables may contain higher levels of certain antioxidants. For instance, research shows that organic foods contain higher amounts of health-promoting antioxidants and lower levels of cadmium, a harmful heavy metal. Is All Organic Food Nutritious? While organic food has many benefits, it's important to note that not all organic food is inherently nutritious. Organic junk food exists, and it can be just as unhealthy as its non-organic counterpart. For instance, organic cookies, chips and sugary snacks may still be high in sugars, fats and empty calories. Therefore, it's crucial to focus on whole, unprocessed organic foods, like fruits, vegetables, grains and lean proteins for maximum health benefits. How to Buy Organic Here are some tips for navigating the organic aisle: 1. Read labels carefully You can't trust misleading food labels. Terms like "Natural," "All Natural" and "100% Natural" are meaningless and don't guarantee that the product is organic. Look for official organic certification labels such as the USDA Organic seal. This ensures the product meets stringent organic standards. 2. Shop locally at farmers markets Buying from local farmers markets can ensure you get fresh, seasonal, organic produce. Additionally, it supports local farmers and reduces the carbon footprint associated with transporting food. Look for farmers markets or community supported agriculture programs to connect directly with local organic farmers. 3. Prioritize your purchases Organic food can be more expensive. Prioritize buying organic for the "Dirty Dozen" — a list of fruits and vegetables that typically have the highest pesticide residues. If you prefer to only buy some organic items, focus on the Dirty Dozen first. 4. Buy organic when you can. Organic food is generally more expensive than non-organic food. However, it's worth the extra cost for the health and environmental benefits. 5. Buy seasonal foods Organic produce that's in season tends to be more affordable and flavorful. Final Thoughts Organic food offers numerous benefits, from reduced pesticide exposure and environmental sustainability to potentially better taste and nutrition. However, not all organic foods are created equal, and being mindful of your choices is essential. A study addressing the organic vs. non-organic food debate suggests that choosing organic is better for your health. This study specifically found a link between eating more organic food and experiencing a reduced risk of cancer. More human data is needed, but it does indicate that promoting organic food consumption in the general population could serve as a promising preventive strategy against cancer. We do know that other factors, like body weight, diet and physical activity, definitely do influence your risk of developing cancer. It's true that organic foods are usually more expensive and sometimes even difficult to find in some areas of the country. Keep in mind that higher intake of cancer-fighting foods, like fruits and vegetables, whether they are organic or conventional, is still encouraged as part of a well-balanced and healthy diet. You don't want to cut out these important nutrient-rich food groups altogether just because they aren't organic. To be extra safe, when organic foods are not an option, try avoiding the "Dirty Dozen" fruits and vegetables that are known to be contaminated with high pesticide residues. The USDA also updated rules on what constitutes organic foods, making it more effective on identifying truly organic foods. By understanding what organic means, recognizing the differences from non-organic options, and learning how to make smarter buying decisions, you can enjoy the benefits of organic food and contribute to a healthier lifestyle and planet. Aiselin82/Getty Images/You see the word "organic" thrown around everywhere these days whether it's on food, clothing, beauty products, and more. But what does it actually mean to call something organic? The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines organic as "produced by methods that enhance or mimic natural processes and that integrate the farm with the surrounding environment." So what does that definition actually mean for you? Here's what you really need to know about buying and eating organic food. What exactly does organic mean?To label a food as organic, it must meet the guidelines set by the USDA. These include: Not using prohibited substances (most synthetic fertilizers and pesticides) for three years prior to harvestNot using genetically modified organisms (GMOs)Raising animals in living conditions accommodating their natural behaviors (like grazing on pasture), feeding them 100% organic food, and not administering antibiotics or hormonesOmitting artificial preservatives, colors, or flavors from multi-ingredient, processed foods with some exceptions, like baking sodaOrganic agricultural production still uses pesticides and herbicides that USDA's organic certification standards have okayed. Just because something is labeled "organic" does not mean that no pesticides or herbicides were used. It simply means that the ones applied met the USDA's production standards for the term. The definition of organic also limits the use of "genetically modified organisms." GMO crops have been genetically altered to withstand the application of herbicides and pesticides — chemicals that protect harvests from viruses and bugs. The introduction of GMOs into the food supply sparked a debate over their health and environmental implications. Anything bearing the USDA Organic Seal is automatically non-GMO. What does organic food mean?USDAContrary to popular belief, organic food relates back to agricultural production, not a specific nutrition- or health-related guideline. For a product to carry the USDA organic label, a third party must verify at least 95% of the ingredients as organic. The phrase "made with organic ingredients" means at least 70% of the ingredients used count as organic. Foods can still list organic even if they're not labeled as such. Since the standard requires third-party verification, there's a cost associated with the certification process. For smaller companies must consistently provide back-up documentation in order to use the "USDA Organic" seal. That makes it less desirable to smaller or newer brands that use organic production practices, but don't want to incur the costs of verification. Is organic food really better? Despite controversial headlines about this labeling claim, the agricultural practice used to produce food does not determine how nutritious it is for you, nor does it directly impact your state of health. Case in point: Organic cane sugar is still sugar. The nutrients you'll find within the food are what, over time, predominantly affect your health — not the growing methods used to make it. Also, organic products will cost more than their non-organic counterparts, which is a critical consideration for most of us on a budget. There's also the question of whether or not genetically modifying crops are harmful to health. But to date, there's no substantial data to imply that GMO crops available on the consumer market pose a direct risk.Tonic Photo Studios/Getty ImagesDoes organic mean healthy? Short answer? No. Growing methods do not universally make foods better or worse for you nutritionally. This is especially true when you consider eating a balanced diet overall. For example, USDA Organic beef is grass-fed, which implies that you'll find slightly more omega-3 fatty acids in it compared to conventionally raised cattle. But if you're also regularly consuming seafood, then you're already getting the omega-3's you need. When you see alarmist headline about a specific pesticide used in conventional agriculture, it's almost always talking about exposure through proximity (i.e., field work), not ingesting the foods we eat. Some population studies show a correlation between buying organic food and better health, but it's important to consider the other factors that buying organic implies, including lifestyle and socioeconomic status. Since there's no specific, isolated link between the two, we simply cannot use the term "organic" to imply "healthy" — despite the fact that it's often marketed as such.As for GMOs and health, the most recent National Academies of Sciences report states that although genetically modified crops may vary in nutritional value, they are not inherently more or less healthy than non-GMO crops. However, some research has shown that organic food is widely available to suburban and rural areas, but not in urban areas. This means that people in urban areas may have less access to organic food, which could lead to health disparities. The most prominent GMO crops are corn and soybeans — can go in packaged foods loaded with added sugar (e.g., sugary beverages made with corn syrup) and saturated fat.Is anything really organic?In food, yes. That's because the USDA requires companies to follow certain agricultural practices before getting verified. But in other types of products, that's not necessarily the case. The Bottom Line: While we still don't know everything about GMOs and organic growing practices, there is one thing about this debate I can say with confidence: It's more important to know exactly what foods are wholesome, nutritious, and health-promoting overall rather than focusing on a specific label claim. The word "organic" is one of those terms that seems to pop up everywhere—on grocery store shelves, in skincare advertisements, in scientific discussions, and even in casual conversations about sustainability. But what does "organic" actually mean? Its definition shifts depending on the context, and its widespread use has led to both clarity and confusion. From organic chemistry to organic farming, the term carries a rich history and a variety of implications. In this article, we'll unpack the meaning of "organic" across its primary uses, explore its significance in modern life, and address why it matters to individuals, industries, and the planet. To understand "organic," we first need to look at its roots. The word comes from the Greek "organikos," meaning "relating to an organ or instrument," which itself derives from "organon," or "tool." Historically, "organic" described things that were alive or derived from living organisms. In the 18th and 19th centuries, scientists used it to distinguish compounds found in plants and animals—like sugars, proteins, and fats—from "inorganic" substances like minerals and salts. This distinction was crucial for early chemistry, where organic compounds were associated with life and inorganic compounds with non-life. Over time, the term expanded. In the early 20th century, "organic" came to describe synthetic materials made from carbon, especially those used in industry. Today, in chemistry, "organic" refers to compounds containing carbon, especially those with carbon-hydrogen bonds, regardless of their source. But outside the lab, "organic" has taken on a life of its own, especially in the realms of food, agriculture, and lifestyle. Let's dive into its most common modern meanings: organic farming and food production. When most people hear "organic," they think of apples labeled "USDA Organic" or eggs marketed as "cage-free and organic." In this context, "organic" refers to a specific method of farming and food production that prioritizes natural processes over synthetic interventions. But what does that really entail? Organic agriculture is a system designed to work with nature rather than against it. It avoids synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Instead, organic farmers use techniques like crop rotation, composting, and biological pest control to maintain soil health and manage ecosystems. The goal is sustainability—producing food in a way that preserves the environment, supports biodiversity, and reduces pollution. In the United States, the term "organic" isn't just a buzzword; it's regulated. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) established the National Organic Program (NOP) in 2002 to set standards for organic certification. To earn the "USDA Organic" label, a product must meet strict criteria. For crops, this means no synthetic chemicals or GMOs for at least three years before harvest. For livestock, animals must be raised without antibiotics or growth hormones, fed organic feed, and given access to the outdoors. Processed foods labeled "organic" must contain at least 95% organic ingredients. Other countries have their own standards. The European Union, for example, has its own organic certification, symbolized by a green leaf logo, with similar restrictions on synthetic inputs and GMOs. While specifics vary, the core idea remains: organic farming seeks to mimic natural systems and minimize human-made alterations. The rise of organic food in the 1990s and 2000s was driven by growing concerns about the health and environmental impacts of conventional farming. Pesticide residues, antibiotic resistance, and the use of synthetic fertilizers became major talking points. Consumers began to demand food that was not only healthy but also environmentally friendly. Organic food's rise was also fueled by the growing awareness of the benefits of natural processes. Many people believe that organic food is healthier, more nutritious, and better for the environment. While there is some evidence to support these claims, the reality is more nuanced. Organic food does have several advantages over conventional food. It is generally free of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, which can be beneficial for human health and the environment. Organic farming practices often promote biodiversity and soil health, which can lead to more sustainable food production. Additionally, organic food is often fresher and more flavorful than conventional food. However, organic food is also more expensive than conventional food, and it can be more difficult to find in some areas. Moreover, organic food is not always healthier than conventional food. Some studies have found that organic food is higher in certain nutrients, such as antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids, but it is also higher in certain pesticides, such as glyphosate. The nutritional differences between organic and conventional food are often small, and the evidence is mixed. In some cases, organic food may be healthier, while in others, it may not be. The bottom line is that organic food is a good choice for many people, but it is not a magic bullet for health or the environment. If you are considering buying organic food, it is important to do your research and choose products that are certified organic by a reputable organization. The benefits of organic food are many, but they are not always as simple as they seem. Organic food is a complex issue, and it is important to understand the full picture before making a decision. Organic food is a system designed to work with nature rather than against it. It avoids synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Instead, organic farmers use techniques like crop rotation, composting, and biological pest control to maintain soil health and manage ecosystems. 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Farmers grow certified organic produce without synthetic fertilizers, chemical pesticides, preservatives, genetic modification, sewage sludge or radiation. Conventional farming often uses synthetic pesticides, which can leave residues on food. Although these residues are generally within regulated safety limits, some people prefer to avoid them altogether by choosing organic options given they are associated with harmful effects. Organic foods are better for the environment. Organic farms don't pollute soil and nearby waters with harmful and toxic chemicals. 2. Better animal welfare Many people who choose organic food also care about the welfare of the animals that provide the food. Organic livestock production is to use materials and practices that enhance the ecological balance of natural systems and that integrate the farm with the surrounding environment. This means that organic farms provide better living conditions for animals, which may translate to healthier meat and dairy products. 3. Potentially improved nutrient content Some studies suggest that organic fruits and vegetables may contain higher levels of certain antioxidants. For instance, research shows that organic foods contain higher amounts of health-promoting antioxidants and lower levels of cadmium, a harmful heavy metal. Is All Organic Food Nutritious? While organic food has many benefits, it's important to note that not all organic food is inherently nutritious. Organic junk food exists, and it can be just as unhealthy as its non-organic counterpart. For instance, organic cookies, chips and sugary snacks may still be high in sugars, fats and empty calories. Therefore, it's crucial to focus on whole, unprocessed organic foods, like fruits, vegetables, grains and lean proteins for maximum health benefits. How to Buy Organic Here are some tips for navigating the organic aisle: 1. Read labels carefully You can't trust misleading food labels. Terms like "Natural," "All Natural" and "100% Natural" are meaningless and don't guarantee that the product is organic. Look for official organic certification labels such as the USDA Organic seal. This ensures the product meets stringent organic standards. 2. Shop locally at farmers markets Buying from local farmers markets can ensure you get fresh, seasonal, organic produce. Additionally, it supports local farmers and reduces the carbon footprint associated with transporting food. Look for farmers markets or community supported agriculture programs to connect directly with local organic farmers. 3. Prioritize your purchases Organic food can be more expensive. Prioritize buying organic for the "Dirty Dozen" — a list of fruits and vegetables that typically have the highest pesticide residues. If you prefer to only buy some organic items, focus on the Dirty Dozen first. 4. Buy organic when you can. Organic food is generally more expensive than non-organic food. However, it's worth the extra cost for the health and environmental benefits. 5. Buy seasonal foods Organic produce that's in season tends to be more affordable and flavorful. Final Thoughts Organic food offers numerous benefits, from reduced pesticide exposure and environmental sustainability to potentially better taste and nutrition. However, not all organic foods are created equal, and being mindful of your choices is essential. A study addressing the organic vs. non-organic food debate suggests that choosing organic is better for your health. This study specifically found a link between eating more organic food and experiencing a reduced risk of cancer. More human data is needed, but it does indicate that promoting organic food consumption in the general population could serve as a promising preventive strategy against cancer. We do know that other factors, like body weight, diet and physical activity, definitely do influence your risk of developing cancer. It's true that organic foods are usually more expensive and sometimes even difficult to find in some areas of the country. Keep in mind that higher intake of cancer-fighting foods, like fruits and vegetables, whether they are organic or conventional, is still encouraged as part of a well-balanced and healthy diet. You don't want to cut out these important nutrient-rich food groups altogether just because they aren't organic. To be extra safe, when organic foods are not an option, try avoiding the "Dirty Dozen" fruits and vegetables that are known to be contaminated with high pesticide residues. The USDA also updated rules on what constitutes organic foods, making it more effective on identifying truly organic foods. By understanding what organic means, recognizing the differences from non-organic options, and learning how to make smarter buying decisions, you can enjoy the benefits of organic food and contribute to a healthier lifestyle and planet. Aiselin82/Getty Images/You see the word "organic" thrown around everywhere these days whether it's on food, clothing, beauty products, and more. But what does it actually mean to call something organic? The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines organic as "produced by methods that enhance or mimic natural processes and that integrate the farm with the surrounding environment." So what does that definition actually mean for you? Here's what you really need to know about buying and eating organic food. What exactly does organic mean?To label a food as organic, it must meet the guidelines set by the USDA. These include: Not using prohibited substances (most synthetic fertilizers and pesticides) for three years prior to harvestNot using genetically modified organisms (GMOs)Raising animals in living conditions accommodating their natural behaviors (like grazing on pasture), feeding them 100% organic food, and not administering antibiotics or hormonesOmitting artificial preservatives, colors, or flavors from multi-ingredient, processed foods with some exceptions, like baking sodaOrganic agricultural production still uses pesticides and herbicides that USDA's organic certification standards have okayed. Just because something is labeled "organic" does not mean that no pesticides or herbicides were used. It simply means that the ones applied met the USDA's production standards for the term. The definition of organic also limits the use of "genetically modified organisms." GMO crops have been genetically altered to withstand the application of herbicides and pesticides — chemicals that protect harvests from viruses and bugs. The introduction of GMOs into the food supply sparked a debate over their health and environmental implications. Anything bearing the USDA Organic Seal is automatically non-GMO. What does organic food mean?USDAContrary to popular belief, organic food relates back to agricultural production, not a specific nutrition- or health-related guideline. For a product to carry the USDA organic label, a third party must verify at least 95% of the ingredients as organic. The phrase "made with organic ingredients" means at least 70% of the ingredients used count as organic. Foods can still list organic even if they're not labeled as such. Since the standard requires third-party verification, there's a cost associated with the certification process. For smaller companies must consistently provide back-up documentation in order to use the "USDA Organic" seal. That makes it less desirable to smaller or newer brands that use organic production practices, but don't want to incur the costs of verification. Is organic food really better? Despite controversial headlines about this labeling claim, the agricultural practice used to produce food does not determine how nutritious it is for you, nor does it directly impact your state of health. Case in point: Organic cane sugar is still sugar. The nutrients you'll find within the food are what, over time, predominantly affect your health — not the growing methods used to make it. Also, organic products will cost more than their non-organic counterparts, which is a critical consideration for most of us on a budget. There's also the question of whether or not genetically modifying crops are harmful to health. But to date, there's no substantial data to imply that GMO crops available on the consumer market pose a direct risk.Tonic Photo Studios/Getty ImagesDoes organic mean healthy? Short answer? No. Growing methods do not universally make foods better or worse for you nutritionally. This is especially true when you consider eating a balanced diet overall. For example, USDA Organic beef is grass-fed, which implies that you'll find slightly more omega-3 fatty acids in it compared to conventionally raised cattle. But if you're also regularly consuming seafood, then you're already getting the omega-3's you need. When you see alarmist headline about a specific pesticide used in conventional agriculture, it's almost always talking about exposure through proximity (i.e., field work), not ingesting the foods we eat. Some population studies show a correlation between buying organic food and better health, but it's important to consider the other factors that buying organic implies, including lifestyle and socioeconomic status. Since there's no specific, isolated link between the two, we simply cannot use the term "organic" to imply "healthy" — despite the fact that it's often marketed as such.As for GMOs and health, the most recent National Academies of Sciences report states that although genetically modified crops may vary in nutritional value, they are not inherently more or less healthy than non-GMO crops. However, some research has shown that organic food is widely available to suburban and rural areas, but not in urban areas. This means that people in urban areas may have less access to organic food, which could lead to health disparities. The most prominent GMO crops are corn and soybeans — can go in packaged foods loaded with added sugar (e.g., sugary beverages made with corn syrup) and saturated fat.Is anything really organic?In food, yes. That's because the USDA requires companies to follow certain agricultural practices before getting verified. But in other types of products, that's not necessarily the case. The Bottom Line: While we still don't know everything about GMOs and organic growing practices, there is one thing about this debate I can say with confidence: It's more important to know exactly what foods are wholesome, nutritious, and health-promoting overall rather than focusing on a specific label claim. The word "organic" is one of those terms that seems to pop up everywhere—on grocery store shelves, in skincare advertisements, in scientific discussions, and even in casual conversations about sustainability. But what does "organic" actually mean? Its definition shifts depending on the context, and its widespread use has led to both clarity and confusion. From organic chemistry to organic farming, the term carries a rich history and a variety of implications. In this article, we'll unpack the meaning of "organic" across its primary uses, explore its significance in modern life, and address why it matters to individuals, industries, and the planet. To understand "organic," we first need to look at its roots. The word comes from the Greek "organikos," meaning "relating to an organ or instrument," which itself derives from "organon," or "tool." Historically, "organic" described things that were alive or derived from living organisms. In the 18th and 19th centuries, scientists used it to distinguish compounds found in plants and animals—like sugars, proteins, and fats—from "inorganic" substances like minerals and salts. This distinction was crucial for early chemistry, where organic compounds were associated with life and inorganic compounds with non-life. Over time, the term expanded. In the early 20th century, "organic" came to describe synthetic materials made from carbon, especially those used in industry. Today, in chemistry, "organic" refers to compounds containing carbon, especially those with carbon-hydrogen bonds, regardless of their source. But outside the lab, "organic" has taken on a life of its own, especially in the realms of food, agriculture, and lifestyle. Let's dive into its most common modern meanings: organic farming and food production. When most people hear "organic," they think of apples labeled "USDA Organic" or eggs marketed as "cage-free and organic." In this context, "organic" refers to a specific method of farming and food production that prioritizes natural processes over synthetic interventions. But what does that really entail? Organic agriculture is a system designed to work with nature rather than against it. It avoids synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Instead, organic farmers use techniques like crop rotation, composting, and biological pest control to maintain soil health and manage ecosystems. The goal is sustainability—producing food in a way that preserves the environment, supports biodiversity, and reduces pollution. In the United States, the term "organic" isn't just a buzzword; it's regulated. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) established the National Organic Program (NOP) in 2002 to set standards for organic certification. To earn the "USDA Organic" label, a product must meet strict criteria. For crops, this means no synthetic chemicals or GMOs for at least three years before harvest. For livestock, animals must be raised without antibiotics or growth hormones, fed organic feed, and given access to the outdoors. Processed foods labeled "organic" must contain at least 95% organic ingredients. Other countries have their own standards. The European Union, for example, has its own organic certification, symbolized by a green leaf logo, with similar restrictions on synthetic inputs and GMOs. While specifics vary, the core idea remains: organic farming seeks to mimic natural systems and minimize human-made alterations. The rise of organic food in the 1990s and 2000s was driven by growing concerns about the health and environmental impacts of conventional farming. Pesticide residues, antibiotic resistance, and the use of synthetic fertilizers became major talking points. Consumers began to demand food that was not only healthy but also environmentally friendly. Organic food's rise was also fueled by the growing awareness of the benefits of natural processes. Many people believe that organic food is healthier, more nutritious, and better for the environment. While there is some evidence to support these claims, the reality is more nuanced. Organic food does have several advantages over conventional food. It is generally free of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, which can be beneficial for human health and the environment. Organic farming practices often promote biodiversity and soil health, which can lead to more sustainable food production. Additionally, organic food is often fresher and more flavorful than conventional food. However, organic food is also more expensive than conventional food, and it can be more difficult to find in some areas. Moreover, organic food is not always healthier than conventional food. Some studies have found that organic food is higher in certain nutrients, such as antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids, but it is also higher in certain pesticides, such as glyphosate. The nutritional differences between organic and conventional food are often small, and the evidence is mixed. In some cases, organic food may be healthier, while in others, it may not be. The bottom line is that organic food is a good choice for many people, but it is not a magic bullet for health or the environment. If you are considering buying organic food, it is important to do your research and choose products that are certified organic by a reputable organization. The benefits of organic food are many, but they are not always as simple as they seem. Organic food is a complex issue, and it is important to understand the full picture before making a decision.

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Organic Ingredients Products with less than 100% organic ingredients cannot use the term “organic” in their labeling. However, they can list the ingredients in the ingredient statement. Benefits of organic food Food is not merely a trend; it reflects a wider understanding of environmental consciousness. Some key benefits of consuming organic food include: 1. Nutritional Value Research suggests that organic foods can offer a higher nutritional value than their conventional counterparts. Studies indicate that organic produce often contains higher levels of antioxidants and vitamins due to the absence of synthetic chemicals and fertilizers. 2. Reduced Exposure to Chemicals By choosing organic food, consumers minimize their exposure to harmful chemicals used in conventional farming. This includes pesticides, herbicides, and synthetic fertilizers, which have been associated with various health issues. 3. Environmental Sustainability Organic farming practices are designed to be environmentally sustainable. They promote biodiversity, improve soil quality, and reduce pollution of air and water sources. This is crucial for the long-term health of our ecosystems. 4. Better Animal Welfare For those who consume animal products, choosing organic can mean supporting better animal welfare practices. Organic livestock are raised in more humane conditions with access to outdoor space and no use of growth hormones or unnecessary antibiotics. The Challenges of Organic Farming Despite its many benefits, organic farming is not without challenges. Understanding these obstacles is vital for consumers who are interested in supporting organic brands. 1. Cost of Production Organic farming can often be more expensive than conventional practices. The cost associated with organic seeds, certification, and sustainable practices may lead to higher prices for consumers. 2. Pest Management Without synthetic pesticides, organic farmers must rely on natural pest control methods, which may prove less effective than chemicals. This can lead to challenges in protecting crops from pests and diseases. 3. Limited Availability Depending on geographical location, some consumers may find that organic options are limited, making it difficult to maintain a fully organic diet. The Future of Organic Food As the demand for organic food continues to rise, the future of organic farming appears promising. Innovations in sustainable agriculture practices, advancements in technology, and increasing awareness of health and environmental issues are likely to drive the growth of the organic market. Consumers are becoming more discerning, seeking the origins of their food and prioritizing transparency. This trend is expected to lead to expanded options for organic products, even in areas where they have traditionally been scarce. Conclusion In conclusion, organic food encompasses a range of practices and standards that prioritize natural farming methods and sustainability. To qualify as organic, food must adhere to stringent criteria, ensuring that it is free from synthetic chemicals and GMOs, produced through humane animal welfare practices, and cultivated with respect for the environment. As consumers become more aware of the implications of their food choices, the organic market continues to grow, catering to those who value health, quality, and sustainability. By understanding what qualifies food as organic, individuals can make informed decisions that align with their values and lifestyle. Embracing organic food is not just a dietary choice but a step toward supporting sustainable agriculture and promoting overall wellness for the planet and its inhabitants. What defines organic food? Organic food is defined as products that are grown and processed without the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The organic farming process should enhance biodiversity and soil health, ensuring that the techniques used are sustainable and environmentally friendly. The USDA sets specific guidelines that producers must follow to label their products as organic. In addition to what is excluded from the production process, organic farming utilizes natural methods to manage pests and diseases. This might include crop rotation, composting, and the use of natural predators. Consumers can often recognize organic foods through their certification labels, which confirm compliance with the required standards for organic farming. Are all organic foods produced the same way? Not all organic foods are produced in the same way, as there are different levels of organic certification and various farming practices. While all organic foods must be grown without synthetic chemicals or GMOs, the methods employed can vary significantly among farms. Some may focus on regenerative practices, while others might follow conventional organic farming methods that still allow for some level of mechanization and external inputs. Moreover, the scale of the operation can influence how organic food is produced. Smaller, local farms may practice organic farming in a more holistic manner, while larger commercial operations might adhere strictly to regulations while still relying on industrial-scale practices. As a result, it's beneficial for consumers to seek out local organic producers to understand their specific practices better. What does the organic label signify? The organic label signifies that a product has been certified according to the standards set by the USDA or other certifying bodies, indicating that the food has been produced without synthetic chemicals, GMOs, or irradiation. The label also ensures that organic farming practices were used in the cultivation and processing of the food. There are different levels of organic certification, including “100% Organic,” “Organic,” and “Made with Organic Ingredients,” each denoting a different percentage of organic content. When purchasing organic foods, looking for the USDA organic seal provides assurance that the product has met the necessary standards. This seal is a helpful guide for consumers who want to support sustainable farming methods and prioritize their health and the environment. How does organic farming benefit the environment? Organic farming benefits the environment in various ways, primarily by promoting biodiversity and maintaining healthy ecosystems. Organic farmers typically focus on soil health and fertility, using techniques such as crop rotation, cover cropping, and composting, which enhance soil structure and nutrient content. These practices help to prevent soil erosion, improve water retention, and reduce pollution in waterways as they decrease runoff from synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Additionally, organic farming encourages the use of sustainable pest management practices that rely on biological control rather than chemical solutions. By fostering natural predators and employing methods such as companion planting, organic farms can achieve pest control while preserving the surrounding environment. This commitment to ecological balance not only benefits the immediate area but also contributes to the larger global effort against habitat loss and climate change. Is organic food more nutritious than conventional food? The nutritional content of organic food compared to conventional food is a topic of ongoing debate and research. Some studies suggest that organic foods have higher levels of certain nutrients and antioxidants, potentially due to the farming practices that prioritize soil health and biodiversity. The absence of synthetic fertilizers may allow crops to develop more naturally, leading to enhanced nutrient profiles in some cases. However, other research indicates that the differences in nutrient content may be minimal and not universally applicable to all organic products. Ultimately, the nutritional value of food depends on various factors, including the specific crop, soil conditions, and farming practices. While organic foods can be part of a healthy diet, consumers should focus on a varied and balanced diet to meet their nutritional needs, regardless of whether they choose organic or conventional products. How can consumers make informed choices about organic products? Consumers can make informed choices about organic products by educating themselves on the various organic certifications and labels, as well as researching the farms and brands they choose to support. Understanding the difference between “certified organic,” “organic,” and “100% organic” can guide consumers in selecting products that align with their values. Additionally, visiting local farmers’ markets or engaging directly with producers can provide insight into farming practices and the integrity of the organic label. Another key aspect is awareness of the seasonal availability of organic produce. Buying foods that are in season and locally sourced not only supports local agriculture but often ensures that the products are fresher and more flavorful. When shopping, consumers should also read ingredient lists and nutrition labels to fully understand what they are purchasing, allowing them to make choices that best suit their dietary preferences and health goals. You’re strolling through your local farmers market or nearby grocery store checking items off your shopping list. You’re trying to eat healthier so you pick up fruits and vegetables, but as you reach for some tomatoes, you see there’s an “organic” option as well.Should you be eating organic foods instead of conventionally grown or raised foods? And what is organic food?The world of organic foods — produce, grains, meat, dairy and eggs — can be hard to understand.But we’re here to help wade through all the labels, regulations and options. Registered dietitian Maxine Smith, RD, LD, explains the pros and cons of eating organic foods and shares how to know if something is organic.What does organic mean?Organic foods are foods that are grown and processed using government-regulated farming methods. Organic farming and foods use.No synthetic fertilizers or pesticides (with exceptions).No antibiotics or growth hormones for livestock.No genetically modified ingredients or GMOs.No artificial flavors, colors or preservatives.No sewage sludge.No radiation on foods. Organic food is not necessarily pesticide-free,” clarifies Smith. “Natural pesticides may be used in the production of organic foods.”You may also see the term “certified organic.” To be certified USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) Organic, farms and food producers must meet certain standards. Only products that contain at least 95% organic ingredients can be certified organic and display the USDA seal.There are different certification levels of “organic.” These are:100% organic. “100% organic” can be used to label any product that contains 100% organic ingredients (excluding salt and water, which are considered natural). Most raw, unprocessed farm products are 100% organic. Many grains, oats and flours can also be labeled “100% organic.”Organic. “Organic” can be used to label any product that contains a minimum of 95% organic ingredients (excluding salt and water). Up to 5% of the ingredients may be nonorganic agricultural products that aren’t available as organic.Made with organic. “Made with organic” can be used to label a product that contains at least 70% organically produced ingredients (excluding salt and water). The nonorganic portion must also follow USDA guidelines. These products can’t be labeled “USDA Organic.”Specific ingredient listings. The specific organic ingredients may be listed in the ingredient statement of products containing less than 70% organic content. These products can’t be labeled “USDA Organic.”“Certified organic farms and food processors must be recertified every year,” says Smith. “Land can’t be certified organic until 36 months have passed since any prohibited substances were used on the land.”How to know if something is organicIt can be confusing to walk down the produce aisle and tell what’s actually organic.Again, all foods labeled “USDA Organic” must meet standards set by the USDA. The USDA evaluates how food is grown, processed and handled. If a food meets these standards it may be labeled “USDA Organic.”And to make it even more unclear, small food producers who sell less than \$5,000 per year may also call themselves organic if they meet these standards. However, they don’t have to go through the certification process (but also can’t label their food as “USDA Organic”).When it comes to meat, you may see some other labels:Animal Welfare Approved. This means that the meat came from animals raised on pastures or ranges by independent farmers and handled in a humane fashion.American Grassfed Association certified. This means the animals were never given antibiotics or hormones. The animals were raised unconfined on pastures, received a 100% forage diet and were born and raised on American family farms.Humane Farm Animal Care certified. This means the animals had unlimited access to the outdoors, they weren’t confined, didn’t receive any antibiotics (unless sick) or hormones, and were handled in a humane fashion.Is organic the same as “natural”?No. The term “organic” refers to how food is processed in addition to the food itself.Currently, no formal definition for the use of “natural” on food labels has been issued by the USDA or the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).“Food manufacturers may use this term when food is free of synthetic preservatives and artificial sweeteners, additives, colors and flavors,” explains Smith. “Natural also can mean that meats are from livestock that weren’t given growth hormones or antibiotics and that produce wasn’t grown with pesticides or other synthetic crop enhancers.”The only government-regulated use of the term “natural” involves meat and poultry. Meat labeled “natural” may contain no artificial ingredient or added color and be only minimally processed. The label must explain the use of the term.But what if your food is “locally grown”? There’s no standard or regulation on what’s labeled “locally grown.” That bushel of strawberries could come from a farm down the street or a place more than 100 miles away.Are organic foods healthier?Is organic food better for you?The health benefits that are linked to eating organic foods are increasing,” shares Smith. “However, it’s not certain that eating organic foods will make a difference in one’s health.”Benefits and drawbacks of organic foodSo, what are the benefits of eating organic food?And are there any cons you should be aware of?Benefits of organic foodsWhen it comes to organic vs. nonorganic foods, organic foods offer:Reduced exposure to pesticides and insecticides. This is a significant benefit of organic produce and grains.Increased exposure to omega-3 fatty acids. Livestock fed through grazing usually have higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which provide healthy heart benefits.Less exposure to cadmium. Studies have shown significantly lower levels of the toxic metal cadmium in organic grains. Cadmium is naturally found in soil and absorbed by plants.Increased levels of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and other beneficial micronutrients. Organically grown fruits, vegetables and grains have higher amounts of vitamin C, vitamin E and carotenoids. They also have higher amounts of the minerals calcium, potassium, phosphorus, magnesium and iron.Less bacteria. Less exposure to bacteria in meat.Less exposure to antibiotics. Eating organic meats leads to less exposure to antibiotics and growth hormones that have been used to treat livestock. These medicines may lead to antibiotic resistance and other problems in humans.And when it comes to the environment, organic foods have an upside.“Organic foods and organic farming are built on the principles of preserving soil and water quality and creating little or no effect on air quality,” highlights Smith. “Not using chemical or sewage as fertilizer reduces toxic runoff into rivers, lakes and ultimately into drinking water.”Additionally, animals are never given antibiotics or hormones and must have organic feed and safe, cage-free living conditions. Crop rotation, cover crops, dense planting and animal manures are methods used to provide nutrients to plants, as well as to control weeds and insects.Drawbacks of eating organic foodThe biggest downside to organic foods is higher production costs, which are passed on to consumers. That means that it costs more money to eat organic foods.If you want to buy organic foods but can’t afford to do so for all of your produce, the nonprofit Environmental Working Group reports the following fruits and vegetables have the highest and lowest pesticide levels when not purchased organic. It may be best to buy organic options for produce with the highest pesticide level.Highest pesticide levels:Strawberries.Spinach.Kale, collards and mustard greens.Nectarines.Apples.Grapes.Peaches.Pears.Bell and hot peppers.Cherries.Blueberries.Green beans.Lowest pesticide levels:Avocados.Sweet corn.Pineapple.Onions.Papaya.Asparagus.Mushrooms.Cabbage.Honeydew melon.Kiwi.Carrots. “If you can’t afford to purchase organic produce, washing and scrubbing fresh fruits and vegetables under running water can help remove bacteria and chemicals from the surface of fruits and vegetables,” shares Smith. “Peeling fruits and vegetables can also remove surface pesticides, but this also reduces nutrients.”Bottom line?It’s a personal choice whether you want to buy and eat organic foods. Consider how much it may cost you, what you can afford and how important any potential health benefits may be.If you’re interested in organic foods, there are some ways you can reduce the costs. Try buying certain fruits and vegetables when they’re in season. You can also shop around at different grocery stores and farmers markets to see which has a better price. Look into joining a food co-op or a community-supported agriculture (CSA), both of which may offer lower prices for buying a membership or purchasing in bulk.“All fruits and vegetables and lean animal sources are your friend whether conventional or organic,” stresses Smith. “Don’t get stuck on organic or conventional food — most importantly foster your health by enjoying an array of these foods each day.”

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