

Organic Foods by Mike DeCinti

I came across a great quote the other day by Marilyn Wann, author of the book Fat! So? She said, “The very existence of the diet industry is proof of its ineffectiveness. If there were one safe, effective way to lose weight, then the others would be out of business.” In part I agree with the statement since it is estimated that Americans spend around 50 billion dollars a year on diet-related items with very little positive results. However I disagree with the idea that there is not a safe, effective way to lose weight. There is, it just has nothing to do with the diet industry.

Eating proper size portions of healthier foods is all you need to do (along with exercise) to lose weight and keep it off for good. No magic pill, no special food program to follow, no point system. Just choose healthier alternatives, and eat the proper amount. Notice I said “healthier alternatives” not health food. I’m not suggesting you eat nuts, berries and tofu, but instead reach for the grilled chicken and baked potato instead of the fried chicken and French fries.

I would also like to de-stigmatize the word diet. Diet may be a four-letter word, but it’s not a bad word. It simply refers to the food that we eat to live. So when I talk about your diet I’m not talking about the latest fad diet or unsuccessful weight-loss gimmick, but simply your daily food intake, as in “Your diet should consist of 5-6 small meals a day which include fresh fruits and vegetables, lean protein and healthy carbohydrates that are low in fat and sugar and high in fiber.”

One way people think they are buying healthy food is to buy organic food. However, this is not always true. Here is some information on what organic means and how it differs from conventionally grown food. The word "organic" refers to the way farmers grow and process agricultural products, such as fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products and meat. Organic farming practices are designed to encourage soil and water conservation and reduce pollution. Here are a few major differences

- Conventional farmers apply chemical fertilizers to promote plant growth and use chemical herbicides to manage weeds. While organic farmers apply natural fertilizers, such as manure or compost, to feed soil and rotate crops, till, hand weed or mulch to manage weeds.
- Conventional farmers spray insecticides to reduce pests and disease and organic farmers use beneficial insects and birds, mating disruption or traps to reduce pests and disease.
- Conventional farmers give animals antibiotics, growth hormones and medications to prevent disease and spur growth. Organic farmers give animals organic feed and allow them access to the outdoors and use preventive measures such as rotational grazing, a balanced diet and clean housing to help minimize disease.

If a food bears a USDA Organic label, it means it's produced and processed according to the USDA standards and that at least 95 percent of the food's ingredients are organically produced. Foods containing less than 70 percent organic ingredients can't use the USDA seal or the word "organic" on their product label. You may see other terms on food labels such as "all-natural," "free-range" or "hormone-free." These descriptions may be important to you, but don't confuse them with organic. Consider these factors when deciding on organic food:

- Nutrition - No conclusive evidence shows that organic food is more nutritious than is conventionally grown food.
- Quality and appearance – Because the main difference lies in how the food is produced, processed and handled, you may find that organic fruits and vegetables spoil faster because they aren't treated with waxes or preservatives. Also, expect less-than-perfect appearances in some organic produce.
- Pesticides - Some people buy organic food to limit their exposure to the residues left by some pesticides. Most experts agree however, that the amount of pesticides found on fruits and vegetables poses a very small health risk.
- Environment - Some people buy organic food for environmental reasons. Organic farming practices are designed to benefit the environment by reducing pollution and conserving water and soil.
- Cost - Most organic food costs more than conventional food products. Higher prices are due to more expensive and labor-intensive farming practices, tighter government regulations and lower crop yields.
- Taste - Taste is a subjective and personal consideration, so decide for yourself. But whether you buy organic or not, finding the freshest foods available may have the biggest impact on taste.

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