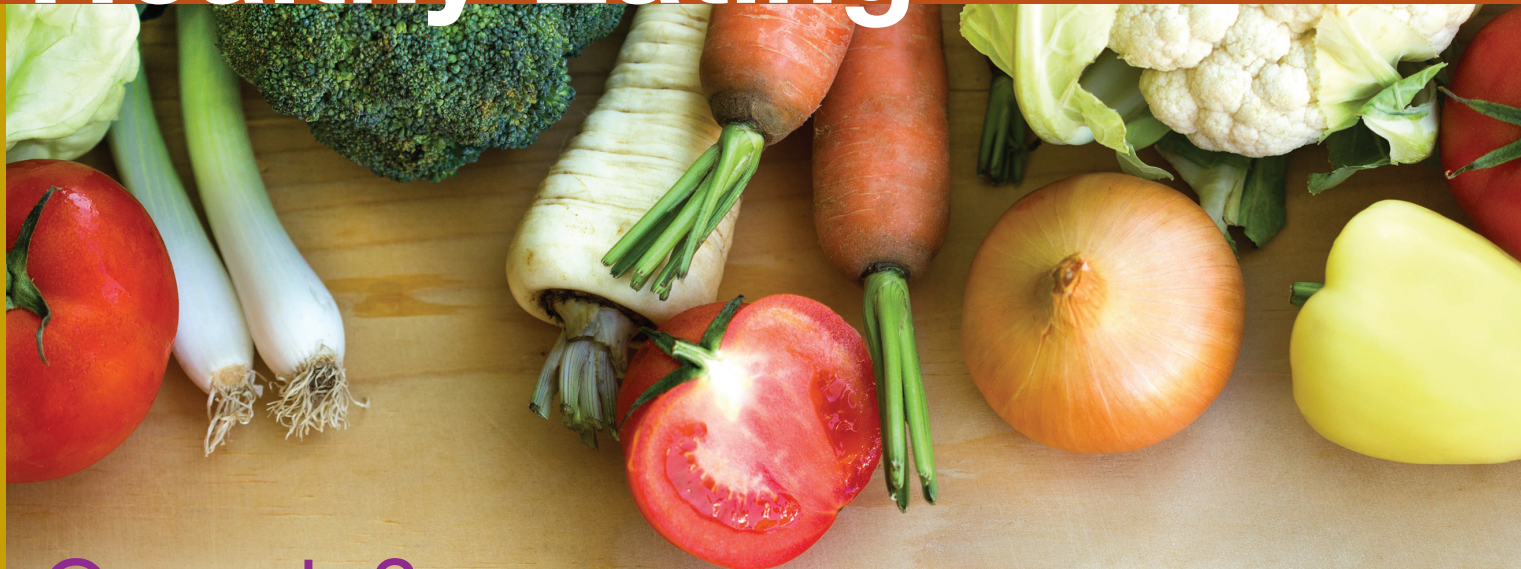


Healthy Eating



Organic? Comparing apples to apples

Should you spend the extra cents to buy organic produce? Is organic a healthier choice? New findings from Stanford University cast some doubt on the benefits of buying organic.



“There isn’t much difference between organic and conventional foods, if you’re an adult and making a decision based solely on your health,” said Dr. Dena Bravata from Stanford’s Center for Health Policy. The study compares the nutrition of organic and non-organic foods and is published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

This is the broadest study to date comparing organic and conventional foods. The researchers did not find strong evidence that organic foods are more nutritious or carry fewer health risks than conventional options, though consumption of organic foods can reduce the risk of pesticide exposure.

The popularity of organic products, which are generally grown without synthetic pesticides or fertilizers or routine use of antibiotics or growth hormones, is skyrocketing in the United States. Organic foods are often twice as expensive as their conventionally grown counterparts.

Although there is a common perception—perhaps based on price alone—that organic foods are better for you than non-organic ones, it remains an open question as to the health benefits.

The researchers found no consistent differences in the vitamin content of organic products, and only one nutrient—phosphorus—was significantly higher in organic versus conventionally grown produce (and the researchers note that because few people have phosphorous deficiency, this has little clinical significance).

There was also no difference in protein or fat content between organic and conventional milk, though evidence from a limited number of studies suggested that organic milk may contain significantly higher levels of omega-3 fatty acids.

The review yielded scant evidence that conventional foods posed greater health risks than organic products. While researchers found that organic produce is 30 percent less likely to be contaminated with pesticides than conventional fruits and vegetables, organic foods are not necessarily 100 percent free of pesticides. What’s more, as the researchers noted, the pesticide levels of all foods fell within the allowable safety limits.

“If you look beyond health effects, there are plenty of other reasons to buy organic instead of conventional,” noted Dr. Bravata. She listed taste preferences and concerns about the effects of conventional farming practices on the environment and animal welfare as some of the reasons people choose organic products.