

## Benefits of Organic Food

We invest a lot in anti-aging products and services, when the simple answer could lie in the way we eat and our nutritional habits. In particular, an organic lifestyle reflects the true adage- we are what we eat.

According to the American Dietetic Association (ADA), American consumers spend over \$33 billion annually on health food and services, in a bid to regain their youth and vitality. While organic food accounts for only a small percentage of the entire food market, its recent growth has been tremendous, with sales figures leaping 20%- 50% per year. A large part of these sales are a reflection of the new attitude of 'baby-boomers', looking to get back to a healthy lifestyle. In fact, baby-boomers comprise the largest segment of the American population at roughly 80 million.

Yet for many consumers, their first thoughts when it comes to organic food range from 'hippie lifestyle' to 'expensive'. What exactly is organic food, why is it healthy for you and why should you be changing your consumption habits to include it?

**Organic** refers to food that contains no preservatives, no added chemicals, fertilizers, coloring or additives and is not genetically modified. With regards to meat, the animals are reared without any antibiotics or growth hormones. In the US, in order for a food to be deemed organic, it must pass FDA regulations and be USDA approved.

While organic food can be both processed and unprocessed (for example, a frozen dinner made out of organic chicken ); the benefits lie in trying to make a large, if not entire part of your meal comprise of organic, unprocessed foods. **Unprocessed organic food** includes freshly bought fruits, vegetables, meat and chicken, all grown and reared by organic farming methods.

So, what are the benefits of organic food?

1. **Organic food contains lower levels of pesticides** – Up to 70% of pesticides which appear in conventional food are banned in the production of organic food.
2. **Organic food has significantly higher levels of nutrients** – Depending on your choice of produce, organic food is shown to have higher amounts of salicylic acid and more Vitamin C, iron, calcium, magnesium and phosphorous. Organic produce is also higher in flavonoids, which help protect the body from cancer causing radicals.
3. **Organic food does not have any synthetic additives**- Artificial food colors and flavors, preservatives, nitrates and sulphites, artificial sweeteners and monosodium glutamate (MSG) are, simply put, not good for you. While some of them are necessary to prolong a product's shelf life, their nutritional benefits are highly questionable. Organic food is produced without any of the above chemicals added to them. Instead, they use natural methods such as adding cane sugar or grape juice to sweeten their product.

4. **Organic food is free of Genetically Engineered (GE) ingredients** – GE involves randomly inserting genes from one organism into an unrelated crop, and today, can be found in over 70% of store bought processed foods. The lack of labeling and of research makes it impossible for the consumer to find out how much GE food is in their shopping basket. As opposed to this, organic farmers do not use GE seeds or irradiation methods. Instead crop rotation and use of natural compost produces a richer soil in which to grow and harvest their produce.
5. **Organic livestock production does not use antibiotics or growth hormones**- Ever wondered why your meat (or in some cases, vegetables) are unnaturally plump and juicy? The answer lies in growth hormones, which are often pumped into food and livestock to make them grow faster and larger. The same goes with antibiotics, which are regularly given to livestock to provide an 'instant' cure. Think of what all these drugs do when they enter your system! In fact the European Union has already banned the use of growth hormones in cattle.

Unlike in the past where one had to drive to a health store to buy organic produce, nowadays, most organic products are readily available in your conventional stores or online. In addition, sites like this one offer the consumer ample information to make an informed buying decision. And remember that in buying local organic produce, you are also in effect supporting your local farming community.

So, go on, make the switch. Your body will definitely thank you for it.

*Flavonoids are compounds found in fruits, vegetables, and certain beverages that have diverse beneficial biochemical and antioxidant effects.*

*Nitrates are chemicals made up of nitrogen and oxygen. The presence of nitrates in soil is necessary for plant growth, however, the application of chemicals and pesticides can lead to excess nitrates, which in turn can cause health problems, particularly for infants and in pregnancy.*

*Sulphites are naturally found in food. However, they are also food additives used as preservatives and people with certain conditions such as asthma or sulphite sensitivity can react quite strongly to the use of sulphites in their food.*

*Irradiation is a process in which food is exposed to ionizing radiation. This destroys bacteria, viruses or insects that might be present and increases the product's shelf life.*