

# Health

## Is Organic Food Really Healthier? The latest research sheds some light on how to shop

BY ALEXANDRA SIFFERLIN

ANYONE WHO'S BEEN IN A SUPERMARKET LATELY KNOWS LABELS CAN BE TRICKY. Between "organic," "local" and other food claims, what's a savvy shopper to do? A recent poll showed that many people simply don't know, with 23% mistakenly believing that local produce is always organic. Meanwhile, a comprehensive new review of research reveals that organic crops have higher levels of antioxidants and less pesticide residue than conventional produce. Of course, all fruits and vegetables are nutritious options, but if eating organic—and avoiding pesticides—matters to you, here's what to know:

ORGANIC



(Actual sizes)



CONVENTIONAL

### How the crops are grown

Organic farms **cannot use GMOs, pesticides or chemical fertilizers.** Also, crops can't be exposed to those things for three years before harvest.

Conventional farms **can use genetically modified seeds,** and crops are **often grown with pesticides and chemical fertilizers.**

### Where the crops are grown

Organic crops can be grown anywhere, as long as the farm adheres to the **USDA's strict organic-certification standards.**

The USDA says **there's no consensus on local.** According to a 2008 act, it means up to 400 miles—equal to the distance from Boston to Washington.

### The nutritional difference

This has been a topic of debate, but a recent study found that **organic food has 17% more antioxidant activity** than conventional crops.

It depends on who you ask, but some argue that the **high yield and larger size of conventional crops** lower their concentration of nutrients.

## To Avoid Pesticides, Go Organic:

1. Apples
2. Strawberries
3. Grapes
4. Celery
5. Peaches
6. Spinach
7. Sweet bell peppers
8. Nectarines
9. Cucumbers
10. Cherry tomatoes
11. Snap peas
12. Potatoes

(The conventional versions have the most residue)



Sources: *British Journal of Nutrition*; *International Food and Agribusiness Management Review*; Alzheimer's Assoc. Int. Conf. 2014; *Pediatrics*; *Journal of Investigative Dermatology*; Environmental Working Group "Pesticides in Produce" Report

## The Checkup

### HEALTH NEWS EXAMINED

#### HEADLINE SAYS:

**Diet and Exercise Can Help Prevent Alzheimer's**

**SCIENCE SAYS:** A large, two-year trial was among the first using randomized, controlled design to show that lifestyle changes can slow cognitive decline. People at risk for Alzheimer's or dementia who exercised, ate well and had social support showed improved memory compared with those who did not make those changes.

It certainly can't hurt



#### HEADLINE SAYS:

**Got a Rash? You Could Be Allergic to Your iPad**

**SCIENCE SAYS:** Many people are allergic to nickel, which is often used in smartphones and tablets. Nickel isn't dangerous at the levels to which people are exposed, but it's the most common cause of contact dermatitis. For protection, put a case on your gadgets.

Cover up!



#### HEADLINE SAYS:

**A Common Incense Scent Can Speed Wound Healing**

**SCIENCE SAYS:** Skin cells have scent receptors, and when they're exposed to sandalwood, those receptors could promote immune-system changes that trigger healing. Understanding just how these non-smell-related functions work, however, will require more research.

We shall see



STRAWBERRIES: TARA JOHNSON FOR TIME; SNAP PEAS: GETTY IMAGES