

FEBRUARY HEALTH NEWS

Organic—or Not?



Is Organic Produce Healthier

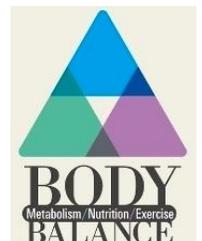
There are at least two good arguments for eating organic: fewer pesticides and more nutrients. Pesticides can be absorbed into fruits and vegetables, and leave trace residues. The Environmental Working Group (EWG), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, pored over the results of nearly 51,000 USDA and FDA tests for pesticides on 44 popular produce items and identified the types of fruits and vegetables that were most likely to have higher trace amounts. Most people have no problems eating conventionally grown produce but if you feel strongly about pesticide residues, the EWG’s list below should help you shop.

As for nutrients, in 2007 a study out of Newcastle University in the United Kingdom reported that organic produce boasted up to 40 percent higher levels of some nutrients (including vitamin C, zinc and iron) than its conventional counterparts. Additionally, a 2003 study in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry found that organically grown berries and corn contained 58 percent more polyphenols—antioxidants that help prevent cardiovascular disease—and up to 52 percent higher levels of vitamin C than those conventionally grown.

Recent research by that study’s lead author, Alyson Mitchell, Ph.D., an associate professor of food science and technology at the University of California, Davis, states it’s a difference in soil fertility: “With organic methods, the nitrogen present in composted soil is released slowly and therefore plants grow at a normal rate, with their nutrients in balance. Vegetables fertilized with conventional fertilizers grow very rapidly and allocate less energy to develop nutrients.” Buying produce from local farmers also means nutrient values in produce will be at their peak, right after harvest. As a general rule, the less produce has to travel, the fresher and more nutrient-rich it remains.

Preferably Organic	If Budget Allows	It’s Your Call
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apples • Carrots • Celery • Cherries • Grapes (imported) • Kale • Lettuce • Nectarines • Peaches • Pears • Sweet bell peppers • Strawberry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bananas • Cantaloupe • Cauliflower • Collard greens • Cranberries • Cucumbers • Grapefruit • Grapes (domestic) • Green beans • Honeydew • Mushroom • Oranges • Peppers • Plums • Raspberry • Summer squash • Tangerines • Winter squash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asparagus • Avocado • Broccoli • Cabbage • Eggplant • Kiwi • Mango • Onions • Papaya • Pineapple • Sweet corn (frozen) • Sweet peas (frozen) • Sweet potatoes • Tomatoes • Watermelon

727-456-6200



Cabbage



If the only time you eat cabbage is when it's drenched with mayonnaise in coleslaw or boiled with corned beef for **St. Patrick's Day**, it's time to broaden your horizons. This surprisingly versatile vegetable just begs to be used more creatively—so we've come up with some other options for you. Like most of its Brassica relatives, cabbage is a

nutritional powerhouse. Rich in **vitamin C** and fiber, it also supplies isothiocyanates—chemicals that amp up the body's natural detoxification systems. Studies suggest that cabbage may help fight breast, lung, colon and other types of cancer.

Since boiling strips away most of its phytonutrients, we like to sauté, steam and even roast cabbage.



A Buyer's Guide to Cabbage

Hard white cabbage, green cabbage (not pictured), and red cabbage are delicious raw in coleslaws or cooked in soups, stews and sautés.

Mildly flavored, delicate **napa (Chinese) cabbage** with ruffled leaves and white ribs, is widely used in Asian cooking. Try it shredded in salads, quick-cooked in stir-fries or slow-cooked in soups or stews.

Savoy cabbage is a loosely packed, wrinkled cousin of the common green cabbage. It's our favorite choice for cabbage rolls and is sturdy enough for roasting.

Hip:Heart Ratio: Bumping out the BMI

A new way to assess risk of heart attack

Just when you've gotten used to the BMI, or Body Mass Index, as the most cutting edge way of assessing your health risks, research raises a new finger of hesitation.



It turns out that, at least when it comes to assessing the risk of heart attacks, the ratio between your waist and hip measurements is a much stronger indicator than that of the BMI,

according to a study from Canada's McMaster University on more than 27,000 people worldwide. A higher ratio may indicate more abdominal fat while a lower one may indicate more lower-body muscle.

To determine your waist-to-hip ratio, measure your waist and hip circumferences with a snug tape measure, then divide the former number by the latter. Women with a ratio of 0.85 and above and men with a ratio of 0.90 or above are at increased risk of heart attack at some point in their lives and should seek advice from their physician.

—Allison J. Cleary

8 Great Ways to Lower Blood Pressure: Sodium Aside



When it comes to "natural" ways to improve blood pressure, sodium restriction snags the spotlight. Most experts agree that limiting sodium is a smart strategy for those looking to lower blood pressure, but why focus on what you can't—or shouldn't—have? Shift your emphasis to positive lifestyle changes you can make to improve blood pressure.

1. Nosh on plenty of produce. Fruits and vegetables are low in sodium and rich in potassium, which offsets sodium's effect on blood pressure. Potassium-packed picks: baked potatoes, baked sweet potatoes, spinach, winter squash, bananas, oranges, cantaloupe, beans and tomatoes.

2. Enhance meals with healthy fats. Substituting some carbohydrates in your diet with sources of healthy fats helps control blood pressure, according to a recent study. Remember to swap, and not add, them in. Think: Nuts instead of croutons—not both—on your salad.

3. Go for whole grains over refined starches. Some studies suggest that whole grains help the body hang on to potassium.

4. Include low-fat dairy in your diet. Calcium plays a key role in regulating blood pressure. Low-fat dairy products offer all the nutrients of full-fat varieties, but without the saturated fat and cholesterol that raise heart-disease risk.

5. Learn to love legumes. Beans, nuts and seeds are rich in magnesium, which contributes to maintaining healthy blood pressure. Aim for 4 to 5 servings (1/2 cup of beans or 1 ounce of nuts/seeds) a week.

6. Savor small amounts of dark chocolate. Studies attest to the blood-pressure benefits of products made with cocoa, which contains antioxidants that activate a substance called nitric oxide that relaxes blood vessels.

7. Move more. Moderate exercise has been shown to improve blood pressure. National guidelines advise 30 minutes of daily moderate activity, such as brisk walking, jogging or cycling.

8. Cultivate inner calm. Studies show that meditation brings blood pressure down—probably by modulating physiological stress responses. You don't have to sit in the lotus position, say "om" or think spiritual thoughts. Simply tuning in to your breathing—for even 10 minutes—may do the trick. Close your eyes (and the door), turn off the cell phone. Now... breathe.



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