

## ***Going Organic***

### *What's the big fuss about 'organic' food?*

I recently read an article where the author said, “I don't believe that paying extra for organic food will benefit anybody but those who sell it.”

There are a lot of people out there who are opposed to buying or eating organic food. I do not know why, but it is possible that the main reason is that it's hard to change; the status quo is always easier to maintain.

When it comes to health in general, and organic food in particular, there is a lack of information. Consumers are bombarded with mixed media messages about what's better for them and they don't know what they should do. Also, the size of the organic industry is relatively small; organic farmers and companies are still not big enough to compete with their non-organic commercial counterparts.

Furthermore, organic laws are not standardised worldwide and don't even exist in most third world countries, which makes it hard for organic producers to thrive. As a result, organic food is not easily accessible and often has the image of being for 'health nerds'.

So, what do you need to know about organic food? *Going organic* can have a tremendous effect on your health. Knowing about organic food and its effects on our body is the first step towards making your own choices about your health and wellbeing.

### **What is organic?**

The definition of organic food differs depending on whom you ask. Most western countries, Canada being the first in 1999, have established national organic standards that make the definition clearer.

In the USA, for example, organic food is defined as, “food that is produced by farmers who emphasise the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides, petroleum-based fertilisers, or sewage sludge-based fertilisers, bio-engineering, or ionising radiation. Before a product can be labelled 'organic', a government-approved certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary to meet organic standards. Companies that handle or process organic food before it gets to the local supermarket or restaurant must be certified too.”

Organic farmers also use methods such as crop rotation, recycling wastes to return nutrients to the land, effective pest management of encouraging beneficial predators and microorganisms, and providing attentive care for farm animals.

After reading the definition of organic food you start to realise that non-organic food can have strange things. If 'sewage sludge-based fertilisers' are not allowed in organic farms, are they used in ordinary farms? Sewage sludge! And that's not all; non-organic food, unfortunately, is treated and sprayed with a cocktail of pesticides, fertilisers and

chemicals that the average person is not aware of. Again, these chemicals are used more abundantly in countries where the laws are not as defined.

To be quite honest, I don't know whether Bahrain has any 'organic' laws. But it would be very interesting to find out. And if not, it will hopefully happen in the near future now that people are a lot more aware of the effects of food on their health.

### **Is organic food better for us?**

Yes. In short, organic food is free of chemicals. Chemicals are toxic to the body. The more toxins we have in our body, the more prone to disease and illness we are. In order to get rid of toxins, our body uses all the essential nutrients, and we end up very little to stay healthy.

People react differently to toxins just like they do with medicines or foods. The effect of toxins will depend on the levels of toxins in the food, the period of exposure, and the health of the body receiving them. For example, a lot of cancers often occur at an older age because certain individuals have had a lifetime of toxin exposure which the body cannot handle anymore.

Some other effects of chemicals and toxins in our body include hormonal problems, infertility, asthma, eczema, allergies, headaches, and brain-related disorders such as mood swings, depression, autism, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Is organic food more nutritious? The nutrient content of the plant is determined mostly by heredity, but also by the mineral content of the soil. And because organic soil is exposed to crop rotation and much less chemicals, it is very likely that the products are more nutrient dense.

Is organic food tastier? I think it is. But I'm biased. So you try for yourself and decide. To me, for example, the difference in taste between an organic and a non-organic apple is huge.

Do organic fruits and vegetables look better? Probably not. Fruits and vegetables are not supposed to look perfect. If you buy a tomato, for example, and it looks perfect; then you take it home and it sits in your fridge for over a week, still looking perfect, then it's probably modified and sprayed. Natural fruits and vegetables have a shorter shelf life and it is very normal to find them with some bruises and odd shapes.

### **What can you do?**

- Do not stop eating fruits and vegetables for fear of pesticides and chemicals. The benefits of fruits and vegetables outweigh the possible risks of chemicals.
- Wash fruits and vegetables very well before consumption. Washing with water is not enough. Wash fruits and vegetables in a tub of water with added sea salt or baking soda to remove all the spray residues. You can also buy a small brush to scrub them with.
- Start your own vegetable garden in your back yard. This is very simple and economical, and as organic as you make it.
- Encourage local vegetable vendors by buying their produce if it is not sprayed.

- Find out which farms have organic milk, free-range chicken and eggs and buy from them.
- Buy organic food if you have access to it. Although organic products are marginally more expensive, you are not just paying for a more ‘natural’ version, you are also paying for the organic farming and handling that went into it. With more people buying organic products over time, prices will go down.
- Buy organic food for babies and children. Children’s bodies react very readily to chemicals, just as they thrive on natural foods.
- Get more information on how to get organic food by asking your local supermarket for their organic products or visiting a health food store.

### LOOK OUT FOR:

Organic food **Myths and common Misconceptions**. TRUE or FALSE:

- Organic food has no pesticides at all. FALSE. Organic farmers are allowed to use various specific chemicals (not including cytotoxic chemicals that are carbon-based)
- Organic farmers use no antibiotics. FALSE. On organic farms, antibiotics would not be permitted as growth stimulants but would only be permitted to counter infections.
- All organic products are better for us than non-organic products. FALSE. For example, I bought a fruit jam from the supermarket last week that was labelled ‘ORGANIC’. However, when you read the ingredients, you find that the first ingredient is ‘organic sugar’. Although the product is organic and all the ingredients are organic, this jam has more sugar than it did fruit! I later found another jam that used all natural fruits, with no added sugar. So, remember to shop smart.

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