

... APRIL 2010 ...

QUICK TAKES



GET ACTIVE AND CUT DOWN ON FUEL USE

- **Walk or bike instead of driving at every opportunity** – some local errands can likely be accomplished without the use of a car.
- **Take public transportation** – not only will this cut down on your gas use, but walking to and from the bus or train station will add activity to your daily routine.
- **Get involved in your community** – advocate for bike paths and safe areas for biking, or volunteer to clean up parks and bike paths.
- **Start gardening** – fresh produce from your own garden will save on fuel use. Also, you'll burn calories while tending to your garden.

Keep It Natural

If you're concerned about your health, a stroll through the supermarket can be daunting. You might have heard that "processed" foods are bad for you, while "natural" or "whole" foods may help reduce risk for disease. Read on to find out how to make informed choices.

What Are Processed Foods?

Many nutritious foods are "processed" in some way. For example, whole oats are rolled into flat discs of oatmeal without losing any nutritional components or having any artificial ingredients added.

But a great number of processed foods have been stripped of their natural nutrients. "The danger of processing is when it's taking out everything beneficial about the food," explains Stephen Pratt, MD, author of "SuperFoods RX: Fourteen Foods That Will Change Your Life." For instance, turning whole wheat into white flour "leaves the calories and takes away pretty much everything else."

Natural Foods: Fight Disease in Your Kitchen

But you don't have to read every ingredient list to improve your diet. "If you don't want to bother thinking about it," says Annemarie Colbin Ph.D., founder of the Natural Gourmet Cooking School and author of *Food and Healing*, "shop the perimeter of the supermarket." This means cutting back on the bottled salad dressings, boxes of chips, crackers, and cookies that cram the center aisles. Cooking your food from scratch is a great way to control the ingredients in what you eat — if you have the time.

Organic Foods: Does It Make a Difference?

The U.S. organic market has been growing at a rate of more than 20 percent a year according to data research group Datamonitor. Why are people going organic? Many feel that there are risks associated with pesticides on produce, hormones or antibiotics in meat, and genetically modified foods, known as GMOs. In the U.S., only foods that are labeled organic are legally required to be free of genetic engineering.

Whole Foods and the Big Picture

Finally, remember that stress can also be a toxic additive to your diet! It's important to be attentive to what you put in your body, but obsessing about health risks with every mouthful is no way to enjoy a meal. "If you have to open a can or a box, or eat something that you don't know where it comes from because somebody serves it to you, just bless the food and be grateful," suggests Colbin.

Take Action!

Ready to start incorporating more natural foods into your diet? Here are five simple ways to get started:

- Do the bulk of your food shopping around the perimeter of the supermarket.
- Check labels on packaged foods and avoid products with hydrogenated oils.
- Choose organic foods when they're available (and affordable).
- Make variety a priority! Choose a new fruit or vegetable to try each week.
- Don't worry! Make healthy choices when you can but don't give yourself stress over every bite.

Why Organic?

So you've seen organic foods in your local supermarket, you know they're supposed to be good for you (organic sounds healthy), but you get sticker shock when you look at the prices. How do you decide whether buying organic should be a priority for you and your family? The first step is to get informed. Read on for answers to some of the top questions about organic foods.

When a food is labeled "organic," what does that really mean?

Until 1999, there were no formal rules governing the term "organic" in the United States. At that time the U.S. Department of Agriculture defined strict guidelines about the production of organic foods, known as the Organic Rule. Here's an overview of the some of the basics:

- Organic farmers are required to use materials and practices that enhance the ecological balance of natural systems.
- Organic foods must be produced using no genetically engineered seeds or crops, sewage sludge, long-lasting pesticides, herbicides or fungicides, or synthetic fertilizers.
- Land used for organic crops must not have been treated with chemicals for three years.
- For livestock, farmers must provide organically-grown feed, fresh air and outdoor access, and use no antibiotics or growth hormones.
- Organic food processors cannot use irradiation, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or synthetic preservatives in processing the food.
- To carry the official USDA organic seal, products must contain at least 95 percent organically produced ingredients, and the name of the certifying agent must appear on packages

What kinds of foods are available as organic?

Most people envision the produce aisle at the health food store when they think of organic products, but today's organic choices include meat, poultry, dairy products, breads, cereals, pastas, frozen foods, canned goods, baby food, chocolate, wine and even pet foods.

Is organic food better for me?

While there are no scientific studies showing that eating organic food is healthier than eating foods produced using conventional methods, it is important to remember that organic foods are spared exposure to potentially harmful insecticides, herbicides, fungicides and fertilizers.

Is organic farming better for the environment?

Yes. Organic farming does not use environmentally harmful chemicals that may contaminate rain and groundwater. Organic farming maintains healthy, fertile topsoil with rich biological matter that does not erode into lakes and streams.

Why do organic foods cost so much?

Organic farmers must comply with strict organic certification standards, which means more labor and paperwork at every step of the process. Large-scale conventional food producers save money by producing huge quantities and shipping in bulk, which organic farmers can't do. Also, organic foods are not treated with synthetic preservatives that make transport easier and prolong shelf life.

So how do I decide whether to buy organic?

In the end, the decision about whether to buy organic foods is a personal one. You need to weigh the lower costs and convenience of shopping for conventional foods to the possible health benefits (and environmental impact) of buying organic.

Asparagus with Orange Zest Takes: Under 30 minutes | Makes: 2-3 servings

Ingredients

1 pound (480 g) thin asparagus spears, tough stems trimmed
1 large orange, scrubbed
1 large shallot or small onion, sliced



Preparation

1. Choose a skillet just wide enough to hold the asparagus and set over high heat. Add water to fill 1/2 inch deep.
2. With a paring knife or a vegetable peeler, remove 2 or 3 strips of orange peel and add to the skillet. Slice the orange in half and squeeze the juice into the skillet. Add the sliced shallots as well.
3. When the liquid comes to a boil, add asparagus spears and cook until just tender, about 2 minutes.
4. Drain and season with salt and pepper. Serve immediately.

Nutritional info / serving

47 calories
0.5 g fat
0.1 g saturated fat
4.0 g protein
9.0 g carbohydrate
2.4g fiber
16 mg sodium