

Eating organic foods is good for the body and planet

By Mandy Kendall

I don't know about you, but I can't wait for the farmers' markets to start up again. I love this time of year with all the fresh local fruits and veggies coming back into season. Buying food that I know has been grown locally satisfies a bit of my "I want to be as green as possible" side.

I know the carbon footprint of the produce is pretty small and it's about as fresh as you can get. I can also ask how the food has been grown and what pesticides, etc. have been used on them.



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Why worry about pesticides? Well, there is growing agreement in the scientific community that prolonged exposure to even small amounts of pesticides can have adverse effects on health, especially during fetal, and childhood development. Pesticides also contaminate groundwater and are believed to be a factor in the "colony collapse disorder", the mysterious, and serious, decline in the pollinating honeybee population that threatens our food supply. The miraculous work of the honeybee is essential to the complex ecosystem of our natural world and responsible for 40 percent of our food production. The honeybee is vital to our survival, but pesticides are slowly eradicating them.

So, we might want to support our local farmers, protect our family's health and the health of our planet, which leads us to organic produce. The issue is that organic produce prices can be substantially higher than regular produce and it can get mighty expensive to go "totally green". So I looked into what I should be spending my organic budget on for maximum benefit.

There is an organization called the Environmental Working Group who do a study each year that is a Shoppers Guide to Pesticides in Produce. The 2011 version is based on federal research into pesticides tests on produce between 2000 and 2009.

It turns out that there is a group of foods they have dubbed the Dirty Dozen – foods that have the highest pesticide load, making them the most important to consider first when buying organic.

The Dirty Dozen:

- Apples
- Celery
- Strawberries
- Peaches
- Spinach
- Nectarines (imported)
- Grapes (imported)
- Sweet bell peppers
- Potatoes
- Blueberries (domestic)

- Lettuce
- Kale/collard greens

Fortunately there is also a list of foods called the Clean 15, which had the lowest pesticide load when tested and are therefore considered the safest, conventionally grown, crops to eat from a pesticide point of view.

The Clean 15:

- Onions
- Sweet corn
- Pineapples
- Avocado
- Asparagus
- Sweet peas
- Mangoes
- Eggplant
- Cantaloupe (domestic)
- Kiwi
- Cabbage
- Watermelon
- Sweet potatoes
- Grapefruit
- Mushrooms

So, if you find the cost of purchasing all your fruits and vegetables from the organic section prohibitive, maybe just

concentrate on the Clean 15.

There is, however, one caveat I would like to add: Although the peeled foods listed above may limit how much pesticide is ingested by the consumer, it does not mean that the farm they were grown on used any less pesticides in the growing process than other farms. Therefore, to help promote the health of you and yours, as well as that of the planet, it is still best to buy organic whenever possible.

Until next time.

Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe. If you have any questions, would like some advice, or would like to request some Qwik-e tips on any health and wellbeing topic, please feel free to drop me an email at healthconnective@gmail.com, visit us on Facebook, or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.