



Is Organic Really Important?

Even the busiest executives start craving the bounty of spring – eating juicy fruits, crisp salads and fresh vegetables. While we all know that eating five servings or more of fruits and vegetables is essential for health, concern over pesticides and choosing organic is a big issue.

Although we often think of a pesticide as a chemical to remove bugs, the term pesticide encompasses other chemicals including herbicides and fungicides – created to remove living organisms that cause damage or disease to crops, humans or animals. This means you are probably using pesticide products in your home, too. Bug sprays and repellants, flea and tick powders and collars, weed killers, and cleaning supplies such as disinfectants and mildew cleaners are all part of the average household.

Clearly, pesticides have a role in a healthy planet. Yet pesticides can be harmful to the humans, animals, and environment they were designed to protect. Pesticides may remain on our food, even after washing, and may linger in our bodies for years. Even with the healthiest of lifestyles, we are constantly exposed to chemicals in our environment because pesticides can travel many miles on wind, water and dust.

We also know that pesticides can cause significant health problems. Researchers have identified links to birth defects and abnormal child development as well as neurological problems and even a variety of cancers, including leukemia, kidney and brain cancer, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

In the US, the EPA sets maximum residue limits (MRLs) for pesticides which are also known as tolerances in an effort to keep harmful pesticides off our food. They work with inspectors from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to inspect and monitor food, as well as the Department of Agriculture to monitor food that travels across state lines.

What the EPA can't monitor is the combined and cumulative effects of pesticides. Which begs the question – how much pesticide exposure is too much? It appears that there isn't one answer because there are so many variables – the age and size of the person, the type of exposure, and even the blend of exposures.

How can you minimize the impact of these chemicals? Choosing organic produce can help pretty quickly because some pesticides break down



relatively fast, providing an immediate impact on your pesticide exposure levels. Choosing organic products also helps the environment overall.

Unfortunately, all organic all the time may not be feasible. Washing produce does help, but be aware that some pesticides are taken up internally by the plants while others are designed to bind tightly to the plant so rain won't wash it off. Peeling does reduce exposure to surface-level pesticides, but the tradeoff is the loss of valuable nutrients and roughage. Canned and frozen foods will often contain the same amounts of pesticides, as well as processed foods and restaurant meals – so look for organic there too.

If you suspect you have health issues due to overexposure of pesticides in your food or environment, see your doctor at Executive MD for a thorough examination.

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