



## Don't opt for organics for wrong reasons

**I saw a message posted on the web that a person lost a lot of weight by eating only organic foods. Is that possible?**

Sure, it's possible, but it's also possible to just maintain or actually gain weight following an organic diet. The fact is, organic foods normally have just as many calories as their conventional counterparts. If you choose to eat organic foods, that's great, but you can't assume that your body will automatically slim down.

That may seem like a simple message, but it can be a difficult concept to internalize. A study in the June 2010 journal *Judgment and Decision-Making* illustrates the point. The researchers reported that most people hold such strong associations between "organic" and "healthy" and "calorie restriction" and "healthy," that they often judge organic foods as having fewer calories even if that's not the case.

For the study, the researchers showed participants a Nutrition Facts label either for a conventional cookie or a cookie "made with organic flour and sugar." Both types had 160 calories per serving clearly marked on the label. Participants were asked if they thought the type of cookie they were reviewing had more or fewer calories than other kinds of cookies. They also were asked how often they thought the cookie should be consumed.

As the researchers suspected, the participants who saw the "organic" nutrition label believed the product

had fewer calories than other cookies and could be eaten more often.

In a follow-up study, the researchers asked participants how much of a concern it would be if a person decided to skip exercise after choosing to eat either a conventional dessert or an organic dessert. Again, they tended to be more lenient toward the person who chose the organic dessert, even though both desserts contained the same number of calories.

Ironically, although most people strongly associate "organic" with "healthy," there is still scientific debate over that issue. In the July 2010 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, researchers systematically reviewed studies over the past 50 years and could find very few that even attempted to link consumption of organic food to specific health outcomes. They recommend more high-quality, randomized controlled trials be conducted with large enough sample sizes to reliably detect the presence of effects of eating organic foods.

In the meantime, determining whether or not to choose organic foods can be challenging. The Mayo Clinic offers guidance on sorting out the issues in an article, "Organic foods: Are they safer? More nutritious?" available online at <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/organic-food/NU00255>.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

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By Martha Filipic

614-292-9833

[filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu)

Editor:

This column was reviewed by Julie Kennel, registered dietitian and program specialist for Ohio State University Extension in the Department of Human Nutrition, in the College of Education and Human Ecology.

Section of Communications  
and Technology  
News and Media Relations  
2021 Coffey Road  
Columbus, OH 43210-1044  
614-292-2011

208 Research Services  
Building  
1680 Madison Ave.  
Wooster, OH 44691-4096  
330-263-3780

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