

Jennifer Cook

N. Mauriello

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## The Organic Life

### 1. Introduction

Go organic! Save the world! Be eco-friendly! Live green! Choose biodegradable products! So, what is all the hype about? Going organic has many advantages. There are health and environmental benefits, as well as economic benefits. Organic living continues to gain in popularity among society, as mothers, fathers, and families in general have a strong desire to gain the knowledge to maintain a healthier lifestyle. What does it mean to live organically? To utilize the idiom, 100 percent organic, items must be either consummately organic or composed of all organic ingredients. Items must also be at least 95 percent organic to utilize the term, organic (staff, Mayo Clinic par. 5). The USDA has stated our bodies are so contaminated with pesticides that if we lived in a cannibalistic society our bodies could not be sold as food under current regulations ("Why Organic Nutrition?" par. 21). Consumers that are shopping in a supermarket believe that a natural food means the same thing as an organic food. Consumers need to educate themselves and be aware that natural food and organic food do not mean the same thing. Consumers also need to be aware of the gardening products that are full of harmful chemicals. Furthermore, it is scary to think about a person that is on numerous prescription medications. How are all those prescription medications affecting his or her health? A recent report in the journal of the American Medical Association said that "adverse drug reactions are

believed to be the leading cause of death in the United States" (qtd. in Duke par. 2). From grocery products, to lawn care and home care products, to pet care, medications, and other natural product options, going organic can be extremely beneficial for the consumer and the environment.

## 2. Eating Organically

Organic foods are healthier and safer than conventionally grown foods. This is because farmers use harmful chemicals and herbicides on crops to keep insects and other pests away and also to preserve the food for longer periods of time. Unfortunately, this leaves the same substances behind for the consumer. Many people believe that the chemical substances that are left behind on food products contribute to a host of health problems like cancer, various skin conditions, intestinal problems, pre-mature aging, infertility, eye problems, asthma, and other health issues. Although the EPA does limit the amount of pesticides and herbicides used by farmers, the risk is still there for potential health hazards from these chemicals. According to Associate Professor of Horticulture at the University of Minnesota, Jeff, Gillman, PhD, "although pesticide tolerances are assumed to be safe, these chemicals are by their very nature toxic, and haven't been studied directly in people" (qtd. in Hoffman par. 8). In addition to this, the FDA does not test every product that chemicals have been used on. The National Academy of Sciences reports that 90% of the chemicals applied to foods have not been tested for long-term health effects before being deemed "safe." Furthermore, the FDA tests only 1% of foods for pesticide residue. The most dangerous and toxic pesticides require special testing methods, which are rarely if ever employed by the FDA (Loux par. 3). Hormones and antibiotics are also another concern. These contaminants are pumped into animals to grow them faster and bigger. Antibiotics are also used for various purposes on animals, even though they are not always

needed. Antibiotics, drugs, and growth hormones are also directly passed into meat and dairy products. Tens of millions of pounds of antibiotics are used in animal feed every year. The union of concerned scientists estimates that roughly 70% of antibiotics produced in the United States are fed to animals for nontherapeutic purposes (Loux par. 9). No one wants to knowingly put even a small amount of toxic chemicals, hormones, or antibiotics in his or her body.

Organic foods are more nutritious and have a better taste. Most experts in this field believe that organic food contains more vitamins and minerals than commercially grown food. On average, organically grown foods provide: 21.1% more iron (than their conventional counterparts); 27% more vitamin C; 29.3% more magnesium; 13.6% more phosphorus (Loux par. 6). Organic food naturally tastes better because of the way it is grown. It is grown specifically for taste, not for show on a produce stand in the local market.

Furthermore, organic food also provides a safer environment. Pesticides and herbicides are absorbed into the ground, and they also pollute the water supply in which everyone drinks from. The poisons and pollution in the ground and water also trickles down to the animals and insects that play a vital role in sustaining the eco-system. This in turn will be harmful to humans. If our environment is not maintained, it will prove to be detrimental to future generations.

Consuming organic food over conventionally grown food should be something everyone considers. There are many choices in life, but this can be one of the easiest choices to make in regards to one's personal health. Healthy living is the key to happiness, as well as longevity. Regardless of one's current lifestyle, eating organic food can provide a multitude of health benefits, provide better tasting food with more nutrients, ensure a safer environment, and possibly provide a longer life. Furthermore, it can be extremely beneficial for all future generations.

### 3. Organic Gardening

Maintaining a cleaner and more improved environment plays a significant role in providing a healthier lifestyle for individuals. It is common knowledge that pesticides pollute the air, the earth, wildlife, and the water supply. A mere 1% of the chemical insecticides applied to plants ever reaches its ultimate destination...the plant insects. The other 99% pollute and poison the air, soil, water table, good insects, animals, and man ("Why Organic Nutrition?" par. 74). When pesticides are sprayed on gardens, the poison drifts throughout the air, absorbs into the soil, exposes insects, birds, and other wildlife to the poison, and ends up in the water supply. This trickles down to the person or people eating the food that comes from the garden that was originally sprayed with the pesticide. Nature's Way Resources facts page asserts:

Many synthetic fertilizers now contain hazardous waste like lead, cadmium, mercury and arsenic. When these toxic fertilizers are applied to crops they are absorbed into the plant and when we eat the food produced they enter our bodies. Studies have shown that 80% of the potatoes used in French fries contain dangerous metals and is one of the causes of ADD of our children. ("Why Organic Nutrition?" par. 75)

In fact, an easy way for an individual to improve gardening practices and the environment is by composting. This concept takes up very little space, and it is a great way to have chemical free mulch and more nutrient filled fertilizer. Composting is a simple way to reduce waste, help tend to the health of our planet and at the same time produce a fabulous soil amendment for your plants and garden. The compost you produce by recycling your waste is an essential tool in improving soil ecology by returning nutrients to the earth (Elmore par. 1). Without composting,

garbage is just garbage. With composting, garbage and waste can be turned into a healthy alternative commodity that can be beneficially used in a variety of ways.

In addition to the healthy environmental benefits of organic gardening, mental health benefits can also be gained. Community organic gardening can provide a higher self-esteem for participants. According to the Diggin' It project participants, the project helped boost their self-confidence, self-esteem, and ability to lead (Fleming par. 6). Organic gardening can help people with Alzheimer's and/or dementia feel more independent. Often times, a patient with one of these diseases feels like his or her independence has been taken away. This leads to anger, frustration, aggression, and other negative behaviors. Gardening can give a person with one of these diseases a sense of independence. Gardening activities can be a beneficial addition to activity programming for individuals with dementia, and the plant-related activities in care facilities have been reported to enable residents with dementia to use their skills, maintain their functional ability, and thus raise their self-esteem (qtd. in Kwack, Relf, and Rudolph par. 1). Once an elderly person loses his or her independence or has the perception of lost independence, it can be detrimental to his or her overall health. Loss of one's independence can lead to depression. Depression will lead to the person becoming socially withdrawn. This leads to even further health problems for the person. Stress is another major contender for health problems in America. In today's world, financial problems are the main cause of stress. Stress can be mentally challenging for a person. Organic gardening can be financially rewarding; therefore, decreasing the level of stress for a family:

In most of the United States it's entirely feasible to grow all of your vegetables for six months of the year. Based on average household income and average purchases of produce, that's an approximate savings of \$796 for a single growing

season. If you are like most gardeners and grow enough vegetables to can or freeze the savings are even greater. (Moore par. 12)

Less financial problems always means less stress. Organic gardening is a mental *release* that allows the partaker to relax, be calm, and have some peace of mind.

Furthermore, engaging in organic gardening can provide better physical health. Digging, hoeing, raking, tilling, weeding, and planting are all physical exercises. These are all things that can help lower cholesterol, lower obesity rates, and improve cardiovascular health. Sweating also helps to rid the body of any toxins that have accumulated. Gardening is an excellent way to gain physical activity. Active people are less likely than inactive people to be obese or have high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, heart disease, stroke, depression, colon cancer, and premature death (CDC par. 7). Gardening can also be beneficial for children, as well. One study results showed digging and raking to be high-intensity, while the other activities were determined to be moderate-intensity. The data can facilitate the development of garden-based exercise programs for children that promote health and physically active lifestyles (American Society for Horticultural Science par. 4). Since the soil is free of chemicals, organic gardening can also provide an increased amount of minerals and nutrients in each of the foods that are produced. The Soil Association conducted a systematic review of the nutrient information available comparing the vitamin and mineral content of organic and conventionally grown food. It was found that, "on average, organic food contains higher levels of Vitamin C and essential minerals such as calcium, magnesium, iron and chromium ("Why Organic?" par. 5). Because food produced in an organic garden is chemical free and contains more minerals and nutrients, the food will naturally have a better taste. This is also the reason chefs prefer to use organic food. Everyone wants better tasting food on the dinner table.

#### 4. Organic Medication

There are many benefits to using organic medicine. However, one of the benefits of using organic medicine is the cost. It is much cheaper to use an organic medicine than it is to use prescription medicine. Organic medicine is the base of where traditional, prescription medicine comes from. Pharmaceutical companies start out with the organic herbs. Then, they add other ingredients to the medicine until they are able to put their own patent on the medicine. It is then sold to the public at a higher price. Another benefit of using organic medicines is that each one of them can treat more than one health condition at a time. For example, Ginkgo Biloba, otherwise known as Ginkgo, not only provides support for circulatory disorders, but it also helps enhance memory (staff, Veria par. 10).

Marketed as an herb for improving memory and mental agility, ginkgo biloba has been found to improve cognitive and social functioning in people with mild to moderate dementia. The anti-dementia effects are similar to that of prescription drugs used for treating dementia. Another positive finding has been as a treatment for mountain sickness--improving peripheral vascular circulation and tolerance of altitude. (Felix 47)

Most prescription medicines are only designed to treat one ailment at a time which leads to more costs to consumers. For example, Cardizem is a blood pressure medication that used solely to control blood pressure. However, often people who have blood pressure problems also have problems with edema. Therefore, they will also need to take a diuretic medication to relieve fluid that builds up in the body. More often than not, people with blood pressure problems also have high cholesterol which requires yet another medication. Can you see how the costs can add up?

There are single organic medications that can treat all of these issues on their own. Using alternative health remedies can also be beneficial in more ways than just economically.

Not only are organic medications more economical to use, there are countless health remedies that they can provide. Some of these remedies include: cardiovascular diseases, digestive problems, respiratory problems, depression, skin problems, and various cancers. Garlic is the most extensively studied medicinal herb; garlic's beneficial effects are still unclear. It is popularly used as an anti-hypertensive and anti-atherosclerotic agent, and some trials have shown this to be the case (Felix 47). It can also boost the immune system, as well as aid in digestion. Echinacea is good for the respiratory system, colds, flu, and infection prevention. “the results are still inconclusive. However, the evidence does suggest a possible supportive role in treating infections and wounds. [ . . . ] Echinacea is also being investigated as a possible anti-cancer agent” (Felix 47). Flaxseed balances health for skin, hair, nails, digestion, and other things. Feverfew can help remedy migraine headaches, other aches and pains, arthritis, and other inflammatory conditions. Furthermore, Feverfew is currently being investigated as an anti-arthritic (Felix 47). Black Cohosh is useful for PMS, menopausal symptoms, and insomnia. Dandelion can be used as an appetite stimulant for people with cancer and undergoing radiation therapy, among other things. Research has shown that St. John's Wort can treat mild to moderate depression. It is also being investigated for use as an anti-cancer and anti-viral drug (including for use against HIV) (Felix 47). This list goes on and on. There are numerous options for maintaining one's health using organic medications. Another draw to alternative medicine is its focus on prevention. Whereas traditional medicine tends to intervene once disease is present, many types of alternative medicine . . . focus on preventing disease before it occurs [ . . . ]



(Calabro par. 6). It just requires a little research, persistence, and patience to decide on what is needed and useful on an individual basis.

Moreover, one can count on fewer side effects from using organic medicine. However, no medicine, organic or otherwise, is going to be without some potential side effects. One must consider all of his or her options in this regard. Although the side effects are fewer with organic medications, they can still trigger allergic reactions in certain instances, can interact with other medications, and they are not regulated by the Federal Drug and Food Administration. The best advice for a people considering the use of organic medications is to discuss everything their physician and make a decision that is right for them.

## 5. Why Organic

Using organic pet care and insect control products are two areas where consumers can improve. At year-end 2011, 56.0 percent of households owned pets (Burns par. 5). This is over half of the world's households that could be living in a healthier way. Organic pet care products are safer for the pet's caregiver, the pet, and the environment. Research has shown that women who were pregnant and used traditional pet care products with pyrethrins in them were more likely to have a child with autism than women who did not (Nutt par. 7). Many over-the-counter pet care products, especially for dogs and insect control products have pyrethrins in them. Dog shampoos, flea and tick sprays, flea and tick collars, insect spray, and other traditional pet care products use this as the active ingredient. Pyrethrins can be toxic to humans, animals, and the environment, when used incorrectly. Unfortunately, many consumers misread labels and use the product incorrectly. Pyrethrin toxicity symptoms in humans include asthma-like respiratory problems, sneezing, headache, nausea, incoordination, tremors, convulsions, redness of the face, and swelling, burning and itching of the skin. Longer term exposure has led to possible brain

defects in babies from exposed mothers, probably due to the synergist often accompanying pyrethroid toxins in most products. There is some evidence of pyrethroid toxins causing carcinogen effects in rats (Stein par. 5). Chemical laden, over-the-counter pet shampoos can dry a pet's skin out, which causes them to scratch incessantly. This will cause them to develop unnecessary rashes and sores, and cause their hair to fall out in patchy areas. It cannot be comfortable for them. The symptoms in mammals of pyrethrin toxicosis are hyper salivation, weakness, vomiting, muscle tremors (one of the more recognizable symptoms), seizures and death (Stein par. 5). If these types of products can do this to the human caregivers and their pets, think about what they are doing to the environment. The EPA states:

Pyrethroids are highly toxic to aquatic organisms. Because the pyrethroids can accumulate in sediments, risk to sediment-dwelling organisms is an area of particular concern. Recent water quality monitoring efforts in California have identified pyrethroids in sediments of water bodies adjacent to residential/urban areas. These monitoring data, coupled with additional pyrethroid-specific data submitted to the Agency, highlight existing concerns regarding residential uses of pyrethroid pesticide products and movement into non-target areas through runoff or spray drift that may occur during applications. (EPA par. 24)

Another negative effect of pest control is that it kills bees with as little discrimination as pest insects, which has disastrous implications for our future as "bees are credited with approximately 85 percent of the pollinating activity necessary to supply about one-third of the nation's food supply" (qtd. in Foss 1). There are cheaper and healthier alternatives such as vinegar, lemon juice or lemons, a variety of essential oils, and other organic methods that can be used for weed control, other lawn care concerns, insect control, and pet maintenance. If the chemicals and

toxins from these products are getting into the environment, then they are also affecting other people and future generations. More things need to be done to educate consumers about the effects of this potentially highly toxic chemical in many pet and lawn care products that are on the market.

In addition to the pet care and lawn care products that contain toxic chemicals, there are many household cleaning products that contain a variety of toxic chemicals. Some researchers have suggested that traditional cleaning products can contribute to cancer, respiratory problems, reproductive abnormalities, allergic reactions, and behavioral problems. Experts also believe that by using traditional cleaning products in the household, even as little as one time per week, increases the chance of developing Asthma. Sara Snow, author of *Sara Snow's Fresh Living* asserts, "green cleaning products can reduce the chances of developing asthma, which 'today is the most common chronic illness and the leading cause of school absences due to chronic illness across the country'" (Reichert, Snow, and Weber par. 6). The chemicals from traditional household cleaning products linger in the home for quite a long time. Couple this with the fact that a home is an enclosed area, the potential for health risks are even greater than the use of toxic products used outside the home. As with the alternative pet care and lawn care products, there are also alternatives that can be used as cleaning products for the home. Baking soda, vinegar, lemon juice, essential oils, and alcohol are just a few of the natural ingredients that can be used to make household cleaning products. Some of the same ingredients can also be used to make laundry detergent and other things used in and around the home. These *natural* products are by far cheaper, provide more antibacterial properties, and are a healthier choice for the consumer and the environment (Ewer 1).

Furthermore, the use of organic skin care products can provide even more health benefits for the consumer. Polyethylene Glycol, DEA, Mercury, Nitrosamines, and Dioxane are just a few of the potentially harmful ingredients that are used to manufacture skin care and make-up products. One study of a popular over-the-counter skin care product in Saudi concluded:

Treated mice showed significant weight loss, and kidneys showed the highest mercury content. Marked histological changes were clearly noted in the kidney . . . Although this popular skin care product's mercury content is less than the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) permissible limits, histopathological changes in the brain, kidney, and liver tissues are evidence of its possible toxicity. (Al-Saleh et al. 1)

Unfortunately for the unknowing consumer, the FDA does not control or monitor the ingredients in these products as they do with food and drug products. Government regulations allow virtually any ingredient to be used in the manufacturing of products that we use daily on our skin, hair, and nails, and in the water we drink (Group par. 2). The skin is a large system of the body and easily absorbs anything. Once absorbed into the skin, the chemicals enter the bloodstream. Once into the bloodstream, the chemicals are carried throughout the body. It does not have a way to expel these things. This leaves the consumer susceptible to a variety of health problems, including liver abnormalities, kidney damage, contact dermatitis, and other health issues. Because the FDA does not monitor skin care and make-up products as they should, the consumer *must* read the labels and remain educated on these types of products to avoid the ones with harmful ingredients. Do not be fooled by a label that says it is all *natural* or *organic*, because this is not necessarily the truth. Again, the FDA does not monitor this. Therefore, it is the consumer's responsibility to ensure the product is really what it says it is.

## 6. Conclusion

As I have shown, it is imperative that more people start practicing organic living practices to improve the current eco-system, as well as the mental and physical health of society. Continuing down the current path of eating traditional food, gardening the traditional way, and taking traditional prescription medications will only prove to worsen the conditions that the world is forced to live in right now. Although the popularity of living organically is growing, it is still not enough. More people need to be educated on the entire process of organic living and how it can help make life better in a variety of ways. Whether it is for the economic benefits, environmental benefits, or health advantages, organic living is at least another healthier alternative for the consumer to consider.

There are many budget-friendly organic options available that can provide safer health and environmental benefits to the consumer. However, it is up to the consumer, not the manufacturer, to make the wiser decisions. As previously mentioned, many diseases and health ailments are linked to the use of traditional over-the-counter products. The only way to prevent this is for consumers to educate themselves more on the various chemicals in these products and choose to use organic alternatives instead. Otherwise, consumers are setting themselves, their families, the environment, and the world as a whole up for detrimental conditions in the future.

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