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## How to Eat Organic and Stay on a Budget

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At the advice of her kids' pediatrician, my friend purchased organic foods to reduce her family's exposure to toxins. However, the next week she purchased conventional foods simply because she could not afford the cost of eating organic.

Despite organic food's increasing popularity, eating 'organic' still costs 40-100% more than eating conventional foods, as reported in a 2015 Consumer Reports study, [The Cost of Organic Food](#). At traditional grocery stores like Wal Mart, a pound of organic butter can cost almost \$3.00 more than conventional butter and a dozen organic eggs about \$2.00 more.

### What Does Organic Mean?

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) report [Organic 101: What the USDA Organic Label Means](#), certified organic produce is grown without the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides and in soil where no chemicals have been applied for at least three years before harvest. As for organic meat and dairy products, animals must graze, eat 100% organic feed, and never receive antibiotics or hormones.

### Why Do Organic Foods Cost More?

The Organic Farming Research Foundation, in a *Scientific America* article, [Why People Aren't Buying into Organic Food Products](#), blames the higher cost of organic foods on the higher cost of organic farming. Organic farming requires costly labor and management to fortify the soil and to control weeds and pests. In comparison, conventional farming uses inexpensive chemicals to do the same work.

## **Is Eating Organic Truly Better?**

My friend's pediatrician based her advice about reducing toxins on a Council on Environmental Health study, [Pesticide Exposure in Children](#). The study showed that children eating organic foods had lower levels of pesticides in their urine than when they were eating conventional foods. Despite this compelling evidence, organic foods still cost more and parents are forced to buy conventional foods to meet their budgets.

## **How Can Parents Buy Organic Foods and Still Make Budget?**

Several online resources offer helpful information to anyone attempting to fit organic foods into their budget. The Environmental Working Group produces two [annual lists](#) based on USDA tests for pesticide levels in produce. The Dirty Dozen includes produce with the most pesticide residue, such as apples, celery, and bell peppers, which consumers should always try to purchase in organic varieties. The Clean Fifteen, in contrast, includes produce less likely to absorb pesticides, like avocados, mangoes, and cantaloupes. According to the USDA, foods like these are safe to eat in conventional varieties.

[WebMD](#) recommends choosing organic meats, milk, peanut butter, and baby foods over conventional options to avoid pesticides. And the [USDA SNAP-Ed](#) website, guides shoppers to save money by purchasing produce during regular growing seasons. Organic produce costs less when supplies are higher, and frozen or canned organic foods are more affordable alternatives during colder months.

## **Do the Benefits Outweigh the Time Involved?**

Organic food plays an important role in improving health, especially in children. Scientific research encourages eating organic, yet organic foods, in general, cost more than conventional foods. According to the USDA, not all conventional foods are bad for health. Educated shoppers know which organic foods are worth the extra cost and which conventional foods are safe to eat. My friend, who bought organic foods and then went back to buying conventional foods to meet her budget, now buys some of both. She plans her family meals around in-season organic and conventional produce, making her selections according to USDA guidelines. She claims the extra time spent learning how to budget for organic food has benefited her family's attitude about healthy eating and her peace of mind about her family's health. Want to give it a try? Check out the resources mentioned earlier or do a little research online. Adding just one or two organic foods to the shopping cart is a proven step in the direction of better health.