



Pesticides in Food

Why should I care about pesticides?

Pesticide exposure can occur through means other than food intake, but research shows that reducing pesticide intake via food has an immediate observable effect on body-burden levels of pesticides. The following are some of the harmful effects pesticides can have on us:

- cause low birth weight and birth defects;
- interfere with child development and cognitive ability;
- cause neurological problems;
- disrupt hormone function;
- cause a variety of cancers, including leukemia, kidney cancer, brain cancer, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Children and fetuses suffer more of these effects from pesticides than do adults because children's bodily systems are still developing. Additionally, children are much less able than adults to detoxify most pesticides. Pesticide effects in the unborn and in infants can have lifelong effects. For instance, the risk of neurological or behavioral problems following early pesticide exposure extends through puberty, as the reproductive system, nervous system, and brain continue to grow.

But I Only Buy Produce from Canada and the U.S. – aren't they safe?

Unfortunately, local does not mean pesticide-free. U.S.-grown foods were just as likely to contain harmful pesticide residues as foods from other countries. In fact, 11 of the 12 highest residue scores were found on U.S. grown foods, according to one study. The foods found to have the highest levels of pesticide residues were domestic and imported peaches, grapes, apples, pears and spinach; U.S.-grown green beans; and U.S.-grown winter squash, both fresh and frozen.

Of these, peaches and frozen winter squash had the highest residue quantities, about 10-fold higher than the other "high scores" according to the study. Foods with the lowest levels of pesticide residues were frozen/canned corn, milk, U.S. orange juice, U.S. broccoli, bananas and canned peaches.

Slightly higher, but still within legal limits, were frozen/canned sweet peas, U.S. and imported apple juice, Mexican frozen winter squash, Canadian tomatoes, Brazilian orange juice and U.S. wheat.

What if I Can't Afford to Buy Organic Foods?

By now, most people understand that buying organic food is a great way to reduce one's exposure to pesticides in food. But that avenue may not be possible for everyone or in every food choice. Perhaps you can't always afford the extra cost often associated with organic food, and organic fruits and vegetables may sometimes be unavailable in your grocery store.

There are ways for parents to give their children fruits and vegetables without exposing them to unhealthy pesticide residues.

Washing and peeling peaches, pears and apples can reduce the amount of pesticides that usually show up on these fruits, because pesticides tend to concentrate just on or under the skin. Unfortunately, washing and peeling won't get rid of residues on squash and potatoes.

In those cases, the pesticides permeate the entire vegetable and you can't wash them off. Also you can't peel spinach or green beans. In these cases, it may be best to consider buying organically grown foods. So, when in the produce aisle, pick organic when you can, and when you can't, try to avoid foods with high pesticide residues and substitute those with low pesticide residues. The next section explains how to do that.

THE RED ZONE . . . AVOID UNLESS ORGANIC!	SO-SO LEVELS . . . SO USE CAUTION!	BETTER . . . BUT NOT PERFECT!	AHH . . . BEST OF THE BUNCH !
Peaches	Spinach	Apple Sauce	Broccoli
Apples	Grapes	Raspberries	Orange Juice
Sweet Bell Peppers	Lettuce	Plums	Blueberries
Nectarines	Green Beans	Tangerine	Papaya
Strawberries	Hot Peppers	Apple Juice	Cabbage
Cherries	Cucumbers	Honeydew Melon	Bananas
Carrots	Mushrooms	Tomatoes	Kiwi
Pears	Cantaloupe	Sweet Potatoes	Canned Tomatoes
Frozen Winter Squash	Oranges	Watermelon	Sweet peas
Celery	Fresh Winter Squash	Cauliflower	Asparagus
	Potatoes	Grapefruit	Mango
			Canned Pears
			Pineapple
			Sweet Corn
			Avocado
			Onions