

A great debate

Organic food v nutritional supplements

By BFA nutritionist SHANE HEATON

Can you get all the nutrients you need from a well balanced organic diet? As a nutritionist I get asked this a lot, so here's my answer: Controversial maybe, but if you're pursuing optimum health, and you probably are if you're reading this journal, then I suggest you eat a diet rich in organic food AND take nutritional supplements. I'm telling you this because I want the organic fraternity to be as healthy as can be. The planet needs you!

There is no doubt that eating predominantly organic food can bring considerable benefits and reduced risks to your health. More vitamins and minerals, fewer pesticide residues, less antibiotic-resistant bugs, fewer food additives, lower nitrates, less processing, more antioxidants, and less environmental degradation are just some of the benefits. So if you're getting all of this from your organic diet, why supplement?

We're exposed to more toxins and stresses than ever before

Quite simply, our physical and psychological environments have changed more rapidly than we can adapt to them. Modern man has invented 10 million new chemicals, thousands of which are added to our food, are found in our homes via household products, are in the water we drink and the air we breathe.

Dr Vyvyan Howard, toxicologist from the University of Liverpool, finds we each have some 500 toxins in our systems that our grandparents didn't have because they didn't exist 50 years ago. While organic food provides a simple and enjoyable way to minimise your exposure to pollutants, you can't avoid them all, and if you tried, the stress would harm you more than the toxins!

Our psychological world has changed rapidly too. Advances in travel and communication have so condensed the world that our brains and bodies, evolved over millions of years, are struggling to keep up. Global news reaches us in under an hour. We can fly almost anywhere in a day. We have instant access to more information than ever before. Some of us are rising to the challenge, but most of us are struggling to keep up and are living with tiredness, anxiety, stress and depression.

These additional burdens mean we need more nutrients than ever before if we are to thrive, rather than just survive, in the 21st century – which brings us to the second key argument in favour of supplementation.



Cherries are a good source of vitamin A and C – but especially at times of stress a nutritionist or naturopath may recommend more vitamin C.

For optimum health, we need more than the RDIS

Official National Food Surveys show that many people fail to get the Recommended Daily Intakes (RDIs) for a variety of nutrients. RDIs aren't enough for optimum health anyway, according to research by Emmanuel Cheraskin and colleagues at the University of Alabama, who found, in a 15-year study of 13,500 people, that the nutrient intakes of the most healthy individuals are often 5-10 times the RDI!

We may be living longer, but other measures of our health like cancer incidence, infertility, mental health, low energy levels, depression, and allergies, all of which are worsening, suggest our health is not as good as it could and should be.

The myth of the 'well balanced diet'

When I began studying nutrition I held the strong belief that "you could get all you need from a well balanced diet". Unfortunately, in the modern world, I now know this simply isn't true. Organic food and farming are essential parts of the solution, but nutritional science is showing that today we need more nutrients than we can get from diet alone to maximise our health and make it last. Remarkably, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the *New England Journal of*

"Were we cannibals, human flesh is so polluted that it would be declared unfit for human consumption."

– Dr Paula Baillie-Hamilton, author of *The Detox Diet*.

Medicine have both recently run articles stating that the best strategy is to eat right and take a multivitamin/mineral supplement, representing a huge shift in orthodox medical thinking.

Remember though, supplementation is no magic bullet either. To achieve optimum health we also need to eat as well as we can (nutrient-rich, low in sugar and fat, less fried food and processed food), not smoke, reduce stress, be physically active, chew well, and live a life that makes us happy.

Plus eat organic

None of this stuff about supplements means that organic food is a waste of time or money. Remember:

- Part of the reason we need more nutrients than ever before is that we are exposed to more pollutants and toxins than ever before. Organic and natural foods reduce the amounts of toxins in your food and the environment.
- Nutrients are higher in organic foods, to the degree that they can help you achieve the recommended daily allowance for various nutrients that you otherwise may fall short on. This still may not be enough for optimum health, but it's a step in the right direction.
- Not all of the compounds in plant foods have even been identified, let alone isolated and put in a supplement. Most nutrients work best in combination with one another, and no supplement can mimic the complexity of the chemical composition of foods.
- Controlled feeding trials with animals have consistently shown better health in those animals fed organic diets, with better growth, fertility, and recovery from illness, even over successive generations.

So the bottom line is that eating organic foods and supporting organic farming are important ways to help yourself to better health. There are also other important ways, and science is increasingly revealing that regular supplementation of additional nutrients is a good idea.

Which supplements?

Start with a high quality multivitamin/mineral every day. If you know you're stressed, consider taking an additional 1000mg of vitamin C per day, and if you know you're exposed to pollu-

tion, take a good antioxidant complex. You may benefit from higher levels of other specific nutrients, though to identify them you should consult a nutritionist or naturopath who can assess your individual needs. ■

References for this article are available at <www.bfa.com.au>



- ◆ **Owner-operated.**
- ◆ **Over 15 years experience in wholesale of organic produce in Sydney.**
- ◆ **Contracts & growing plans designed to accommodate your needs as well as those of the consumer market.**



**Suppliers of quality
CERTIFIED ORGANIC PRODUCE**

**Call Josef on 0428 114 707 or email
backtoeden@bigpond.com**

**Our warehouse is located:
Cnr Park & Bedford Rd's, Homebush
Ph: 02 9746 0070 Fax: 02 9746 0040**

BUYING & SELLING ORGANIC PRODUCE

WHOLESALERS & EXPORTERS UNITED ORGANICS

BRISBANE MARKETS

CERTIFIED ORGANIC fresh fruit and vegetables from our **FULLY TEMPERATURE CONTROLLED PREMISES**



*For advice on what to grow and when to maximise returns,
whether certified or "converting to organic"*
For fair and prompt payment for quality produce



Growers' Merchants
Brisbane Markets "E" Block
PO Box 54 QLD 4106

organics@unitedorganics.com.au
TEL: (07) 3278 5997
FAX: (07) 3278 5998

Contact
Ross Cowling 0438 763 761
Jim Davis 0438 245 167