



## GOIN' ORGANIC

With the New Year underway, I started thinking about ways to improve my life and my health. This year, I've been heavily considering the thought of going organic—well, for the most part, anyway. To be honest, this is actually more like the third year. Don't trip. We all backslide on those New Year's resolutions. With the addition of more organic food and produce in major supermarkets and the long awaited arrivals of Whole Foods and Trader Joe's to the Milwaukee area, I technically no longer have an excuse. Organic food as defined by the National Organic Program for the U.S Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A) is food "produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. Organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones."

While eating organic food is becoming increasingly popular, I have looked towards the more practical, health-conscious side to transitioning. I asked a friend who has been eating organic for years, professor, journalist and author, Dr. Jamie Walker. For starters, organic produce and foods are better for the environment and our bodies with little to no chemicals or pesticides. This means no dangerous pesticide residue on our food or streaming into our water supply. Newbies to the organic game should weigh the pros and cons to switching from conventional food to organic foods.

Organic food is produced, generally by small farms, without the use of fertilizers or other harmful substances. This allows our bodies to consume more vitamins and minerals and less chemicals, therefore making noticeable improvements in our bodies and minds. Organic food has been proven to contain higher levels of vitamin C, antioxidants and minerals. Dr. Walker, who switched to organic food on advice from a vegetarian friend, credits her increase in energy and stamina to the switch. Organic food is also believed to aid in resisting chronic illness and ailments by giving our bodies the nutrients needed to have a stronger immune system. "Haven't gotten a cold in almost a year or two," she boasts.

The downside, for lack of a better term, would be a very discernible price difference. According to Wikipedia, some organic food and produce can cost anywhere from 10 to 40 percent higher than conventional produce. Pricing is determined by the shipping cost of the product and the way in which it is produced. For example, eggs and dairy products have strict regulations to meet and guidelines to follow to be considered certified organic. Inspectors are contracted out by the government to ensure that farmers have proper soil quality or have their livestock on the appropriate diets to meet U.S.D.A standards.

What does this mean for low-income families or those of us who are on a strict budget? To be honest, my first trip to Whole Foods, I was intimidated by some of the pricing and did not think I could keep up with the lifestyle. Dr. Walker says living healthy and organically is still feasible for the individual or family on a budget. "They should start with a small trip to a local organic store," says Dr. Walker, who supports both local and major organic store chains. "I would start with organic meat; organic chicken, organic fish...I would also make it a quest to stop eating red meat and switch from regular D milk to Silk Soy milk," she also recommends.

Still apprehensive? Stop in a store that offers organic options and investigate. Spark up a convo with an available store clerk or customer. From personal experience, they are all too happy to entertain your curiosity. They will have great insight on the benefits of organic food, product comparison and areas in which to begin your exploration. If you are more of an experimenter, start one item at a time-with your staple goods. Dr. Walker leaves us with a final thought, "[going organic] is a general love and wholeness/oneness for the earth and all other life. Make the change!"

For more on organic produce and the U.S.D.A's National Organic Program, visit [www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexIE.htm](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexIE.htm). For more about Dr Jamie Walker visit [www.jamiewalker.org](http://www.jamiewalker.org)

