

Module 11 Lesson 2

Transcript

I'm super excited to talk about organics today. It's a loaded topic, and inexhaustible to discuss and I get asked a lot about my views on organic all the time. What to buy or what to prioritize purchasing organic and if buying organic really matters at all. So I want to cover all of these questions and challenge you to think about your own position on organic foods. We laid a solid foundation in TNS level one with the definitions and basics, so now it's time to ask the tough questions and think about our food supply a little bit more in depth. For the purpose of this lesson, I'm sticking to the food. We can talk about organic clothing and cleaning products and farming practices and everything under the sun, but really today I want to limit our lesson to food, health and sustainability as much as possible.

To give you a brief overview of what we're going to discuss, what organic really means, the debate between organic versus conventional produce, how to use this information to guide your food choices and what to ultimately recommend to clients you're working with. I want to start with a refresher on what the term organic really means. We covered this in depth in the handouts in TNS level one, again I already mentioned that, but since the word is thrown around so often we can forget what it legally means so I want to review it. By definition, organic means of relating to, yielding or involving the use of food produced with the use of feed or fertilizer of plant or animal origin without employment of chemically formulated fertilizers, growth stimulants, antibiotics or pesticides. That's a little bit of a mouthful there.

To take this one step further, we're looking at practices of growing food that are as natural as possible. Using seeds that are found in nature, planted in soil that is made up of plant material that was once alive, watered with water that comes from rain and good old fashioned irrigation practices and planted in rotating plots so the soil can keep growing things. The true diehards will tell you that organic really is all about keeping the soil as healthy as possible, but for our clients, few of them are worried about the dirt that their food grows in. I mean maybe some are, that's usually not first and foremost what they're asking about when they ask about organic.

So what do our clients care about most? Mostly they want to eat food that doesn't have harmful chemicals like pesticides or herbicides or even wax on them. I'd say that most of the clients I come across are worried that inorganic chemicals may cause cancer, behavioral problems, autoimmune diseases and other health issues. The truth is, they may have a right to be worried because so many chemicals sprayed on our foods and so many fertilizers we use to grow our foods may cause illnesses. We just don't know for sure because most are GRAS, generally recognized as

safe. But, we do know that so many are not actually safe and we hear about them in the news all the time. And we also know that GRAS doesn't even necessarily mean anything really, it doesn't mean that it's safe just because it's GRAS unfortunately. I'd also argue that there's a percentage of your clients that are worried that the risks of consuming conventionally grown produce outweigh the benefits they get from eating the foods we want them to eat. I've had clients say they didn't eat an apple and chose a packaged snack instead because they thought the apple was less healthy than the organic fruit leather.

So what should we do? As health practitioners, as people that are coaching people here, what is our role? I'm going to start with the science because that always anchors me. The research is pretty new but it's also pretty clear that organic produce is barely healthier in terms of nutrients than conventional produce. There may be a trace amount more of antioxidants, omega three fatty acids and phenols, but if there is, it's really just a little bit. The data absolutely says that there is lower exposure to pesticides on organic produce when compared to conventional produce, but it also concludes that the exposure is really minimal and conventionally grown produce don't come near breaking the global safety standards.

I'm firmly in the camp that eating conventional fruits and vegetables is safe in the exposure levels that we're dealing with in the United States and I tell all of my clients that they should not fear eating them. The benefits of the nutrient density, the vitamins, the minerals, the fiber and the phytonutrients far outweigh the risks in my book when compared to not eating them at all. But, of course, on the other hand, I encourage organic 100% if clients are open to it, have access to it and it's feasible for them.

So are you skeptical? Well you should be a little bit because it isn't so cut and dry. I get it. I do tell everyone to wash their conventional produce very well before eating it. I recommend a little white vinegar if the residue seems especially resistant to coming off. I'm definitely a poster child for the dirty dozen and the clean 15, which is put out by the Environmental Working Group or EWG. They list the foods that are most important to prioritize buying organic and the foods that you should not be as concerned about eating conventional. That is a super great place to start with your clients. If they don't want to spend their entire paycheck going organic, but they want to start incorporating organic foods, definitely start with these lists so they can focus on the best place to spend their money.

I believe that organic is also better for the earth, air, water supply and our bodies. So there's lots of reasons to go organic. But I also know that it's really expensive and complicated for farmers to certify their crops as organic, so if you go to a farmers market, you might be buying fruits and

vegetables that don't say organic, but by the way that farm might be a lot healthier and use a lot less chemicals than other organic products you're buying at the grocery store. So talk to your local farmers, it's another great reason to go to the farmers market.

I know my own beliefs on what, how and when I choose to buy and eat organic and they may be different reasons than the TNSer sitting next to me, they may be different than yours and they may be different than my client's. But it's important for all of us to have as much information as possible to make the choices that fit best into our own lives and you want to do that same thing for your clients. So I use some of that flexible educated thinking when I'm counseling. Meeting my clients where they're at in terms of their own food choices is how I can feel like I'm supporting them and confident in helping them meet their eating and wellness goals. So I encourage you to work with your clients to challenge their own beliefs and evaluate their own beliefs so that they can feel confident in their own choices in buying and eating and navigating our food supply.

Also, I want you to remember that organic doesn't mean everything. So another thing to realize is that there are still some pesticides used in organic farming. Yes, the list of allowed pesticides is much, much smaller than compared to conventional farming, but organic standards still allow liberal use of approved chemicals. So the biggest takeaway as I've already reiterated is to do the best you can and advise clients to do the same. Empower your clients to make great choices, empower your clients to feel like they're educated in this area and knowledgeable and good about all the choices they're making. Make the best food choices you can in the situation you're in and realize it's not always going to be perfect and that is absolutely okay.

So let's review some key concepts here. Organic food is produced with the use of feed or fertilizer of plant or animal origin without employment of chemically formulated fertilizers, growth stimulants, antibiotics or pesticides. The science supports that conventional and organic produce is very similar in terms of actual nutrition. Science does show lower exposure to pesticides on organic produce compared to conventional produce but exposure is minimal. I recommend washing all produce thoroughly and don't forget to use the EWG's dirty dozen and clean 15 list as a guide for when to choose organic and when to skip it and also to consider other factors like budget, availability and freshness when choosing between organic and conventional. Bottom line, any produce is better than none. I hope you have a little more insight and a little more clarity to bring to your conversations with our clients. I'll see you in the next lesson.