
Pesticides

Pesticides have been in use since the 1900's and have contributed to increased availability and variety of fruits and vegetables. These chemicals help to increase crop yield and reduce spoilage during storage and shipping.

In recent years, consumers have been encouraged to eat more fruits and vegetables due to their many health benefits. Because of increased use of pesticides in our food supply, there is also rising concern about the safety of these "chemicals". Although some laboratory animal studies have shown that prolong exposure to large amounts of pesticides may increase the risk of cancer and birth defects, the long term effects of these chemicals on human health have not been clearly established.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) have been primarily responsible for the regulation of pesticide use and the establishment of an acceptable daily intake level for humans. According to recent reports, pesticide residues in foods are well below established safety standards and should not pose a significant risk to human health. Therefore, consumers should continue to include fruits and vegetables as an essential part of a healthy diet.

Even though it is not possible to eliminate all pesticide residues in our foods, here are some ways to reduce your exposure to them:

- Eat a varied diet to lessen your exposure to any one pesticide.
- Choose produce in season, as there's less need for pesticides when grown in the right season.

- Buy domestically grown fruits and vegetables. Imported ones usually contain more pesticide residues.
- Wash produce carefully under running water to remove most of the surface dirt and pesticides.
- Scrub hard vegetables and fruits such as taro, potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, pears, especially if you plan to eat the skins.
- Peel fruits and vegetables with wax coating, e.g. apples, cucumber, eggplant. Wax itself is harmless but it seals in pesticides left on the produce.
- Discard the outer leaves of leafy vegetables such as cabbage and lettuce.
- Trim the leaves and top of celery. Tests show that celery contains more chemical residue than most produce.
- Remove visible fat and skins of meat, poultry, and fish. Animals and fish feed on plant foods that may contain pesticide, and these chemicals tend to concentrate in the fat and skins.
- Select certified "organic" foods that are produced without the use of pesticides, antibiotics, or hormones.

Follow the above steps and include a variety of fruits and vegetables in your diet. Numerous studies have confirmed the health benefits of consumption of fruits and vegetables in reducing the risk of some cancers and heart disease. The benefits of eating fruits and vegetables far outweigh the risk of exposure to minute doses of pesticides in foods.