The dirty truth about the dirty dozen

Every year the Environment Working Group (EWG) releases a list known as the "Dirty Dozen". The "Dirty Dozen" lists the top fruits and vegetables with the most amount of pesticide residue. While this report is released each year and picked up by all major news outlets, what we as consumers should make of this? As with anything related to research it is important to look at who is funding the research and how does the information affect your life. With connections to the industries who benefit from individuals buying organic produce, the EWG's goal is to educate the public about how to reduce their overall consumption of pesticides. However, this week's handout highlights why this information can be extremely misleading and what you can stay informed and keep your family healthy!

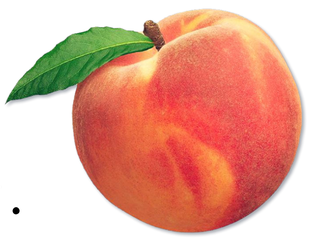
The 2021 dirty dozen list

1. Strawberries

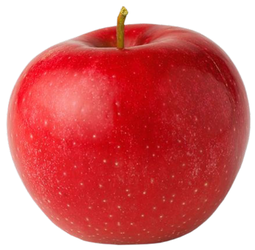
2. Spinach

3. Kale, Collard Greens & Mustard Greens

4. Nectarines



5. Apples



6. Grapes

7. Cherries

8. Peaches

9. Pears

10. Bell Peppers/ Hot Peppers

11. Celery

12. Tomatoes

But why is this information misleading...

1. Essentially organic and conventional fruits and vegetables are nutritionally equivalent. Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, no matter if they are organic or conventional, has been linked to a reduction in developing a chronic diseases and living a healthier life.
2. Pesticides are substances that are intended to prevent, repel and destroy pests, regulate plant growth and used as a nitrogen stabilizer. These are used on both organic and conventional produce. The Environmental Protection Agency sets safety levels that are regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture.
3. The Dirty Dozen lists fruits and vegetables that have the highest amounts of pesticides, but it fails to equate if these levels pose any negative health effects. The amounts found in these foods are substantially lower than any level that has been correlated with negative health outcomes.

Bottom line: If you have the resources and prefer to buy organic than there is no reason to change that. If conventional produce is more cost-effect and easier to buy than there is also no reason to change that. If you want to pick organic options of the Dirty Dozen that works too. The key here is that it is important to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables every day.

Based on the amount of pesticides in these produce items and the amount needed to have a negative impact on one's health.....

Your teen would have to eat more than

680
servings of
apples
each day

Your child would have to eat more than

7, 235
servings of
carrots
each day

*Based on calculator from safefruitsandveggies.com

Created by Jillian Kaye, MS, RDN in association with Bright Healthy Smiles