

## HOW COMMON IS GENETICALLY ALTERED FOOD? GO GMO-FREE AND FIND OUT<sup>1</sup>

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Numerous polls and studies from *The New York Times* to *Consumers Union* have showed that Americans don't want genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in our food supply. Yet biotechnology firms have pushed them so vigorously that GMOs are in roughly 80 percent of the packaged foods sold in the U.S. and Canada, according to the Grocery Manufacturers Association. And as salmon farmers push to get FDA approval for genetically engineered salmon, it's more important than ever to send the message to farmers and food manufacturers alike that we don't want any more frankenfood infiltrating our grocery stores.

The easiest way to do that is to give up GMOs for a week—or a month! This October, the Non-GMO Project is sponsoring its first-ever Non-GMO Month in an effort to raise awareness of its "Non-GMO Project Verified" certification. Their focus is primarily on packaged or processed foods, which can contain any number of genetically modified ingredients, such as soy, corn, cotton (cottonseed oil is a common ingredient in processed foods), sugar beets, and sugar cane. All those GMOs could be causing long-term damage. Few human studies exist on the health hazards of GMOs, but according to the American Academy of Environmental Medicine, animal studies have shown that they can cause infertility, immune problems, accelerated aging, faulty insulin regulation, and changes in major organs and the gastrointestinal system. And, the group notes, soy allergies among humans increased 50 percent after GMO soy was permitted for use in the UK. Allergies are one of the most common concerns related to GMOs, considering that genes from allergenic foods, such as peanuts, milk, and wheat, could be transferred to other non-allergenic foods and cause life-threatening reactions.

Want to keep all those things from happening to you and your family? Read on for are four easy ways to go GMO-free for a week, a month, or the rest of your life:

**#1: Buy organic.** Because the FDA doesn't require food companies to label products as containing GMOs, the easiest way to avoid them is to buy only certified-organic foods. By definition, organic products can't contain any ingredients produced using biotechnology or genetic engineering.

**#2: Know the code.** Most of the attention focused on GMOs deals with commodity crops commonly used in processed foods (corn, soy, cottonseed oil, and canola). But biotech scientists have genetically engineered a bunch of other crops that are still sold in stores, though in smaller quantities, that don't get quite as much attention: zucchini, yellow crookneck squash, sweet corn, and Hawaiian papayas. In other parts of the world, GM sweet peppers, potatoes, and rice are under development. One way to know if your sweet corn is of the frankenfood variety is to look at the little stickers attached to produce. According to international PLU-code guidelines, GMO foods contain the number "8" before the four-digit code printed on the produce sticker. Organic foods contain the number "9."

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<sup>1</sup> Rodale News, October 05, 2010

**#3: Get verified.** As mentioned, the Non-GMO Project has a third-party verification system that certifies products as being GMO free. If you can't find a certified-organic version of what you're looking for, look for the "Non-GMO Project Verified" seal. That goes for dietary supplements, as well, which can't be certified as organic but often contain soy-based fillers. Currently, the only supplements manufacturer verified by the Non-GMO Project is New Chapter. You can search for GMO-free products on the organization's website, where you can also download a PDF shopping guide or their new iPhone app.

**#4: Go grass-fed.** GMO crops make their way into the food chain via secondary sources, too, such as the cattle, chicken, and pigs that eat GM corn or GM alfalfa. Buying grass-fed meat ensures that your dinner didn't dine on GMOs. Opt for organic dairy products, too, as the synthetic growth hormones used to treat conventional cattle are genetically modified.