

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Organic produce and meat typically isn't any better for you than conventional varieties when it comes to vitamin and nutrient content, according to a new review of the evidence.

"People choose to buy organic foods for many different reasons. One of them is perceived health benefits," said Dr. Crystal Smith-Spangler, who led the new study.

"Our patients, our families ask about, 'Well, are there health reasons to choose organic food in terms of nutritional content or human health outcomes?'"

To try to answer that question, she and her colleagues reviewed over 200 studies that compared either the health of people who ate organic or conventional foods or, more commonly, nutrient and contaminant levels in the foods themselves.

Those included organic and non-organic fruits, vegetables, grains, meat, poultry, eggs and milk.

Many of the studies didn't specify their standards for what constituted "organic" food - which can cost as much as twice what conventional food costs - the researchers wrote Monday in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

According to United States Department of Agriculture standards, organic farms have to avoid the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, hormones and antibiotics. Organic livestock must also have access to pastures during grazing season.

#### SAME VITAMINS

Smith-Spangler and her colleagues found there was no difference in the amount of vitamins in plant or animal products produced organically and conventionally - and the only nutrient difference was slightly more phosphorus in the organic products.

Organic milk and chicken may also contain more omega-3 fatty acids, they found - but that was based on only a few studies.

Smith-Spangler told Reuters Health it was uncommon for either organic or conventional foods to exceed the allowable limits for pesticides, so it's unclear whether a difference in residues would have an effect on health.

He said more research is necessary to fully explore the potential health and safety differences between organic and conventional foods, and that it's "premature" to conclude organic meat and produce isn't any healthier than non-organic versions.

"Right now I think it's all based on anecdotal evidence," Lu said.

SOURCE: <http://bit.ly/PSHmuj> *Annals of Internal Medicine*, online September 3, 2012.