

Potential confounding factors—like high income or physical activity level—are especially important when studying the health benefits of organic food, because eating organic is associated with lots of things that also help you live a longer, healthier life. In other words, people who regularly eat organic food tend to have other lifestyle factors and habits that could easily lower cancer risk as well. Even within just this one study, high organic food consumption was associated with higher income, higher occupational status (a "better" job, like being a manager or working an intellectual office job), more physical activity, eating more fruits and veggies, and eating less meat and processed food. Those are all things that make you more likely to stay healthy than those who can't afford to take such good care of themselves.

And on top of those potential confounders, it's very easy for people to misreport how much and what kind of food they really eat. "Organic food intake is notoriously difficult to assess," notes an accompanying editorial in JAMA, "and its self-report is highly susceptible to confounding by positive health behaviors and socioeconomic factors."

The researchers can try to control for these issues, which means doing statistical analysis to try to figure out the effect of organic food with all other factors being equal, but the problem with confounders is that it's very difficult to control for all of them.