

Washington Post dietitian: Environmental Working Group, activists irresponsibly fan fears by citing 'scary-sounding' but harmless chemicals in food

Would you worry if you knew your food contained sucrose octanoate esters or tocopherols? They might sound frightening, but don't fret. These substances in packaged foods are also known as sugar, fat and vitamin E.

But see what I did there? I used chemical names to evoke fear by telling you those items were in your food. For a moment, you were probably wary of ingesting tocopherols

[Editor's note: Cara Rosenbloom is a registered dietitian.]

The Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit organization that focuses on human health contributes to this fear. In March, it released a report called "Organic: The Original Clean Food," which asserted that organic packaged foods are safer than conventional packaged foods, because they don't contain toxic pesticides or added chemicals.

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"The word chemical just means a composition of things — air, water, soil — everything is a form of chemicals," says Elvira de Mejia, a professor of food science and toxicology at the University of Illinois. "For human safety, we need to consider a chemical's quality and the quantity that's used, not just worry about a scary-sounding name."

Read full, original article: [When chemicals are used to scare you about food](#)