

Tomatoes

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Tomatoes have numerous health benefits due to their rich carotenoid content. Tomatoes contain beta carotene, lutein, zeaxanthin and large quantities of lycopene. Tomatoes are also a good source of vitamin C and potassium. A one cup serving of many tomato products contains more heart healthy potassium than a single banana-- without all the sugar! Most of the scientific research on tomatoes has focused on lycopene, a fat soluble red pigment that is also present in guavas and watermelon. One cup of cooked red ripe tomatoes contains about 7,000 mcg of this special anti-oxidant Lycopene is best absorbed when tomatoes are cooked with some fat, such as olive oil. Tomato sauce and paste are great sources of this nutrient.

Lycopene has been shown to have many important health benefits. In general, lycopene is useful in cancer prevention, especially breast, colon and prostate cancers. A combination of tomato and soy products was found to reduce serum PSA (prostate specific antigen—a marker for prostate cancer) by 34% in eight weeks. Lycopene from tomatoes is helpful for both asthmatics and allergy sufferers. A clinical study done in 2007 found that 360 mg of tomato extract daily for eight weeks decreased sneezing and rhinitis (runny nose) in patients with hay fever. The ability of lycopene to decrease inflammation and markers of oxidative stress, thus protecting LDL- cholesterol from oxidation and decreasing lipid peroxidation of cells, make this carotenoid an important nutrient for cardiovascular health. Lycopene from tomatoes may also provide special protection for smokers against DNA damage . Tomatoes may also play a role in healthy blood pressure maintenance. A recent study showed that tomato extract

could be used along with medication to reduce systolic blood pressure by 10 points in treated but uncontrolled hypertension.

For those who plan to spend a lot of time in the sun, think tomatoes. A clinical study in humans found that lycopene from tomato paste products can provide protection from sunburn when consumed regularly. Here, subjects who consumed 40g of tomato paste with 10g of olive oil daily for 10 weeks had a 40% reduction in sunburn.

Like many compounds in nature, lycopene from tomatoes is found in both cis and trans isomer forms. Tomato products primarily contain the trans- form of lycopene, while it is the cis-form that is mostly found in human blood and tissues. For this reason, varieties of cis-isomer-rich tomatoes are being developed to increase lycopene bioavailability. Tangerine or high beta-carotene varieties of tomatoes are higher in cis-isomer lycopene and can increase serum lycopene more than all-trans varieties

Heart health, cancer prevention, skin protection-- these are just a few of the many benefits of flavor-rich, versatile tomatoes. Enjoy this summer's bountiful harvest in good health!

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