



Your Experts for Life

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Health Benefits of Tomatoes

REA Cheryl Vasse
Human Nutrition, Diet, and Health

Summer has arrived and it is time to enjoy locally grown produce. Many of us have small plots of land set aside for growing seasonal vegetables. Some of us may be container gardeners. Whatever you grow, nothing can beat the taste of home grown produce especially tomatoes.

Not only are tomatoes delicious, they also have many health benefits. Tomatoes may help in the prevention of cardiovascular disease and provide cancer-fighting abilities. Tomatoes are high in phytochemicals and recent research has focused on the phytochemical lycopene which is found in tomatoes. Lycopene is a powerful antioxidant. Lycopene is a carotenoid that gives tomatoes their red color. There are hundreds of carotenoids found in fruits and vegetables that contribute to yellow, orange, and red colors in these fruits and vegetables. Beta-carotene, which is found in carrots, is probably the most familiar carotenoid.

A Harvard University study that followed 48,000 men for 6 years showed that men who ate 10 or more servings of foods per week containing tomato sauce or tomatoes decreased their chances of developing prostate cancer by 45 percent. Men who ate four to seven servings per week decreased their chances by 20 percent.

Lycopene may also reduce the risk of heart disease. Research has shown that lycopene reduces oxidized low-density lipoprotein (LDL) which is known as the bad cholesterol.

According to Cornell University food scientists, heat processing tomatoes increases the lycopene content. However, the heat process decreases the vitamin C content of tomatoes. The longer the tomato is heat processed, the more vitamin C is lost. Tomatoes processed at 190.4 degrees Fahrenheit for 10 minutes lost 10 percent of their vitamin C content and 29 percent when processed for 30 minutes. The longer the tomatoes were heat processed, however, increased the amount of lycopene.

Studies have found that supplements do not have the same protective benefits as the actual tomato or cooked tomato products. In one study, it was found that beta-carotene supplements given to smokers actually increased the risk of developing cancer.

Research has shown the benefits of eating a diet rich in a variety of fruits and vegetables. Carotenoids, including lycopene, as well as other nutrients are found in a variety of fruits and vegetables. Including cooked and raw tomatoes as a part of your weekly fruit and vegetable intake will provide you with a good source of lycopene.

Whether you are a serious gardener or a beginner, tomatoes are well worth the effort because there is nothing better than home grown tomatoes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheryl Vasse".

Cheryl Vasse