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News Release

## **Beat the Heat— Protect Yourself with Natural Sunscreen**

Nothing is better on a hot July day than a garden fresh tomato sandwich or a sweet, refreshing slice of watermelon. Now researchers are promoting the consumption of these foods as a means to protect ourselves from sun damage. Studies in the United States and Britain conducted on both animals and humans have reached the same conclusion that there is a secret ingredient in certain foods that can reduce skin damage and the aging effects of harmful sun rays. That ingredient is a super antioxidant known as lycopene. It is the red pigment found in tomatoes, watermelon, pink grapefruit, apricots, red oranges and paprika.

Tomatoes are very high in lycopene, but watermelons have 40 percent more of the age defying chemical. Other foods, such as broccoli, green leafy vegetables, bran, legumes, orange zest, green tea, pomegranate and omega-3 fish contain other antioxidants that help protect the body against the sun's radiation and reduce inflammation caused by the sun. However, watermelon and tomatoes are the stand outs.

On the flip side, there are foods that can make your system more susceptible to sun sensitivity. Foods not to take on a picnic include carrots, celery, parsley and limes. Drinking margaritas beside the pool while munching on celery and carrot sticks would definitely be a bad idea.

As a precautionary note, please don't think that antioxidant foods can replace your sunscreen. Sun damage should not be taken lightly because it can lead to skin cancers. Lycopene foods should be thought of as added protection, not as a cure-all.

For more information about this or other nutrition related topics please contact Jennifer Dutton at the St. Clair County Extension office by phone at (205) 338-9416 or email [jld0021@aces.edu](mailto:jld0021@aces.edu).

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