



The Latest Science on Tomato Products and Health

Tomato Products Featured in the 2010 Dietary Guidelines and MyPlate

The Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC), a panel of nutrition scientists and experts, were tasked at reviewing the body of evidence on nutrition science in order to create the comprehensive DGAC report in 2010. This report, which focused on recommendations for eating a disease-preventative dietary pattern, was used to create the final version of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines, which provides clear goals for healthful eating for Americans, and MyPlate, a graphic tool which makes recommendations for portions of foods within specific categories that Americans should eat every day. For the first time, the DGAC highlighted the importance of eating a “red-orange” vegetable category throughout the entire process of developing the Dietary Guidelines and MyPlate. In particular, the Dietary Guidelines includes the following key recommendation:

“Eat a variety of vegetables, especially dark-green and red and orange vegetables....”

Tomato Products, the Easy Vegetable

Easy, affordable tomato products are so delicious, it’s no wonder that they appear in some of our most beloved dishes, including spaghetti, pizza, tacos, enchiladas, soup, and stew. But the nutritional profile of tomato products also makes them shine. Rich in potassium, folate, and vitamins A, C and E, tomato products can be an important contribution to your daily diet. And they can make it easy to gain one of those elusive servings of vegetables in your diet. In addition, tomato products are a rich source of the carotenoid lycopene; more than 80% of the lycopene in U.S. diets comes from tomato products, such as canned tomatoes, tomato sauce, pasta sauce, pizza sauce, tomato soup, tomato juice, salsa, and ketchup. Lycopene is attracting the attention of researchers for its potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activities. But research reveals that it’s not just the lycopene—tomato nutrients appear to work together synergistically to provide health benefits.

Tomato Products Fight Cardiovascular Disease

Dozens of studies over the past two decades have linked tomato products consumption with heart health. Research indicates that tomato products consumption may protect the heart by several mechanisms, including the reduction of LDL cholesterol, homocysteine, platelet aggregation, blood pressure, oxidative stress and inflammation levels in the body. The Women’s Health Study found that women consuming higher intakes of tomato-based products had lower cardiovascular disease risk; an association not observed with lycopene intake alone. In recent research sponsored by the Tomato Products Wellness Council, tomato products produced protective effects against oxidation and inflammation among overweight adults (*Acta Hortae*, 2011). These benefits are linked with the reduced risk of heart disease.

Tomato Products May Protect Against Prostate Cancer

Tomato products appear to protect against a number of specific cancers, such as breast, colorectal and gastric. But the most promising area of protection involves prostate cancer. When it comes to prostate cancer risk in men, data suggests that eating lycopene from tomato products may reduce the occurrence and progression of this form of cancer. Researchers from Montreal conducted a meta-analysis that included 11 case-control studies and 10 cohort studies or nested case-control studies on the use of tomato, tomato products, or lycopene. Compared with nonfrequent users of tomato products, consumers of high amounts of raw tomatoes had an 11% reduced risk of prostate cancer, and those with a high intake of cooked tomato products experienced a 19% reduced risk. In the most comprehensive scientific analysis of cancer prevention and causation ever undertaken, the *Second Expert Report - Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective* notes that a substantial amount of evidence indicates tomato products and foods containing lycopene probably do protect against cancer, potentially decreasing the risk for prostate cancer by about 11%. The report notes that there is a substantial amount of evidence on tomato products, and that food containing lycopene probably does protect against cancer. In particular, foods containing lycopene are listed as providing a convincing decreased risk for prostate cancer. Tomato products show such promise in battling prostate cancer that a research team led by John Erdman, PhD of the University of Illinois recently received a \$400,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health to trace how tomato carotenoids help to reduce risk of prostate cancer in humans. This study will help scientists better understand how tomato carotenoids are absorbed and metabolized in the body in order to protect against prostate cancer.

Tomato Products, a Sustainable Part of Plant-based Eating

Widely recommended by health experts, a plant-based diet which focuses on a variety of whole grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds is linked with better health. Results of an evidence-based review showed that plant-based diets reduce the risk of ischemia, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes; lower LDL and blood pressure; reduce body mass; and reduce overall cancer rate. Risk of chronic disease lowers due to decreased intake of saturated fat and cholesterol and increased intake of fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals. In addition, a plant-based diet is better for the environment, compared with an animal-based diet. In the 2011 Meat Eater's Guide to Climate + Health released by the Environmental Working Group, 20 types of meat, fish, dairy and vegetables were evaluated to determine their carbon footprint (impact on greenhouse gas emissions) and health attributes. Plant-based foods such as broccoli, tofu, beans, tomatoes, and lentils offered the greenest and healthiest choices. In fact, tomatoes were listed as the 19th greenest and healthiest food choice among the foods evaluated.

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