



ELITE

Personal Training and Fitness Solutions

HEALTH TOPIC OF THE WEEK

8/14 - Tomatoes are a Superfood!

Introduction

When you think of the word superfood what comes to mind? Chances are it's not the humble tomato. But they are. Not only are they packed with flavor, but tomatoes are also loaded with important nutrients that are vital for overall health.

Tomatoes are so common that you might not consider them superfood. But they are!

Nutrients & Benefits

- **Lycopene** belongs to a class of compounds called carotenoids, powerful antioxidants that promote skin health, protect against certain cancers, and decrease the risk of heart disease and diabetes. Tomato products provide 80% of dietary lycopene consumed in the U.S.
- **Beta-carotene** is a phytochemical that is converted to retinol in the body, which then becomes vitamin A. Vitamin A is important for supporting eye health. It protects against cataracts and macular degeneration. Beta-carotene varies between types of tomatoes. For example, cherry tomatoes have a higher content than regular tomatoes. A 2017 article in Molecular Cancer Research linked the intake of elevated levels of beta-carotene to the prevention of tumor development in prostate cancer.
- **Vitamin C** (known as ascorbic acid) is antioxidant that can prevent oxidative stress. Additionally, it increases non-heme iron absorption from plant sources, while also preventing the iron inhibiting effects of calcium.
- **Vitamin K** is a fat-soluble vitamin that is important for protein production. These proteins are necessary for the formation of blood clots, and the prevention of bone loss. Vitamin K has also been shown to protect against heart disease.



Elite Personal Training and Fitness Solutions does not provide medical treatment or intervention. We acknowledge scientific evidence that appropriately intensive exercise and sustainable nutritional intervention can have significant impact on chronic health disorders and obesity, dramatically improving symptoms when recommendations are followed. Please visit us at Eliteptf.com for more information and to schedule your evaluation.

- **Fiber** is a nutrient with many benefits, yet most people don't get enough in their diets. Fiber is the fertilizer that allows beneficial bacteria to grow into the gut. It also helps lower cholesterol and blood sugar levels in addition to controlling appetite. And of course, fiber promotes bowel health and encourages regular bowel movements.
- **Folate** (vitamin B-9) is important in red blood cell formation and for healthy cell growth and function. Folate helps to balance homocysteine levels. Homocysteine is an amino acid that results from protein breakdown. It is believed to increase the risk of heart attack and strokes. The management of homocysteine levels by folate reduces the risk factors for heart disease.



GMO Concerns

- GMOs (genetically modified organisms) are a hot topic today. GMOs are plants that have been genetically engineered with DNA from bacteria, viruses, or other plants. These plants are engineered to withstand herbicides and insecticides. Most GMO plants are used to produce highly processed ingredients (i.e., oil, high fructose corn syrup), biofuel, or animal feed.
- Are there any GMO tomatoes on the market today? The answer is no. Although a GMO tomato was developed in 1994, it was quickly removed from the market. No GMO tomatoes are currently being grown commercially in North America or Europe.



Nightshade Concerns

- Tomatoes are one of several foods (others include white potatoes, eggplants, and peppers) that belong to the nightshade category. Search the internet for nightshades and you're bound to find numerous articles warning about inflammation and arthritis pain. No research has turned up evidence that nightshades affect joints. However, studies have found that many nightshade vegetables actually reduce inflammation levels in the body.
- Foods in the nightshade category offer many significant health benefits. There is no reason for the majority to shy away from consuming tomatoes or other nightshades. However, there is a caveat for those on beta-blockers. Beta-blockers are often prescribed for heart disease. This medication can cause potassium levels to increase in the blood. Therefore, high potassium foods such as tomatoes should be consumed in moderation when taking beta-blockers.



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Purchasing

- Make sure the tomatoes you buy are bright red. Look for tomatoes with smooth skin and no blemishes or bruises.
- Press your thumb gently against the tomato. Make sure it gives slightly. This is an indication of ripeness.
- Take a whiff. Smell is also key when selecting the right tomatoes. The stronger the fragrance, the better the taste.
- Buy organic. Organic tomatoes are grown without fertilizers or pesticides, both of which add harmful toxins to the body.



Canned versus Fresh

- Nothing beats a tomato fresh from your garden, but don't discount canned tomatoes. They are another healthy option. With canned tomatoes, you benefit from their nutrition all year long. In fact, lycopene is more bioavailable in the form of canned tomatoes vs. fresh. The heating process helps break down the cell walls, thus making nutrients easier to absorb. When cooked, tomatoes deliver 2-3X more lycopene than a raw tomato.
- Enjoying canned tomatoes—harvested at their flavor and nutrition peak—during the off-season is a much more sustainable choice than fresh tomatoes, which often must be shipped long distances.



Super Easy Four-ingredient Tomato Sauce



Ingredients

- 4 lbs. ripe tomatoes, preferably Roma, stem and core removed
- 1 cup olive oil
- 2 tsp salt
- 3-5 fresh basil leaves

Directions

1. Add all ingredients to a large pot set over medium/low heat. Once it begins to bubble start smashing the tomatoes with the back of a spoon to help them break down.
2. Cook the tomatoes for 30 minutes, stirring often to avoid scorching. Sauce should be thick. If it is too thin, continue cooking for a few more minutes.
3. If you're planning on adding fresh basil (and we hope that you do!), throw 3-5 leaves into the pot.



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Notes: Those who have an immersion blender can use it to do a rough blend. Please do not skimp on the olive oil. Use a full cup. It makes the sauce absolutely silky. This simple tomato sauce is made for pasta, and all that oil helps to make sure the finished tomato sauce really clings to it.



References

Peer-reviewed Journal Articles

Barone D, Giordano, A et al. (2018). Antitumoral potential, antioxidant activity and carotenoid content of two Southern Italy tomato cultivars extracts: San Marzano and Corbarino. *Journal of Cellular Physiology*. 233(2): 1266-1277. doi.org/10.1002/jcp.25995.

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General Interest Internet Articles

Tomatoes: Benefits, facts, and research (medicalnewstoday.com)

Tomatoes 101: Nutrition Facts and Health Benefits (healthline.com)

5 fun facts about tomatoes - Tomato Wellness

GMO Tomatoes: A Common Misconception (GMO Answers)

What's the Deal with Nightshade Vegetables? (Cleveland Clinic Health Essentials)



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