

WebMD[®] Health Properties of Tomatoes

By Elaine Magee, MPH

Here are 10 reasons why you should have tomatoes in your kitchen and pantry:

1. Tomatoes contain all four major carotenoids: alpha- and beta-carotene, lutein, and lycopene. These carotenoids may have individual benefits, but also have synergy as a group (that is, they interact to provide health benefits).
2. In particular, tomatoes contain awesome amounts of lycopene, thought to have the highest antioxidant activity of all the carotenoids.
3. Tomatoes and broccoli have synergy that may help reduce the risk of prostate cancer. One study showed that prostate tumors grew much more slowly in rats that were fed both tomato and broccoli powder than in rats given lycopene as a supplement or fed just the broccoli or tomato powder alone.
4. A diet rich in tomato-based products may help reduce the risk of pancreatic cancer, according to a study from The University of Montreal. The researchers found that lycopene (provided mainly by tomatoes) was linked to a 31% reduction in pancreatic cancer risk between men with the highest and lowest intakes of this carotenoid.
5. Tomatoes contain all three high-powered antioxidants: beta-carotene (which has vitamin A activity in the body), vitamin E, and vitamin C. A U.S. Department of Agriculture report, *What We Eat in America*, noted that a third of us get too little vitamin C and almost half get too little vitamin A.
6. Tomatoes are rich in potassium, a mineral most of us don't get enough of. A cup of tomato juice contains 534 milligrams of potassium, and 1/2 cup of tomato sauce has 454 milligrams.
7. When tomatoes are eaten along with healthier fats, like avocado or olive oil, the body's absorption of the carotenoid phytochemicals in tomatoes can increase by two to 15 times, according to a study from Ohio State University.
8. Tomatoes are a big part of the famously healthy Mediterranean diet. Many Mediterranean dishes and recipes call for tomatoes or tomato paste or sauce. Some recent studies, including one from The University of Athens Medical School, have found that people who most closely follow the Mediterranean diet have lower death rates from heart disease and cancer. Researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health, who followed more than 39,000 women for seven years, found that consumption of oil- and tomato-based products -- particularly tomato and pizza sauce -- was associated with cardiovascular benefits.
9. When breastfeeding moms eat tomato products, it increases the concentration of lycopene in their breast milk. In this case, cooked is best. The researchers also found that eating tomato products like tomato sauce increased concentrations of lycopene in breast milk more than eating fresh tomatoes did.
10. Tomato peels contribute a high concentration of the carotenoids found in tomatoes. The amount of carotenoids absorbed by human intestinal cells was much greater with tomato paste enriched with tomato peels compared to tomato paste without peels, according to a study from Marseille, France. The tomato skin also holds most of the flavonols (another family of phytochemicals that includes quercetin and kaempferol) as well. So to maximize the health properties of tomatoes, don't peel them if you can help it!

Source: <http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/health-properties-tomatoes>

DETERMINATE: (bush) varieties do not need pruning and may be grown with or without support; fruit ripens within a concentrated time period.

INDETERMINATE: (climbing) varieties should be staked, trellised, or caged, and pruned for best results; fruit ripens over an extended period.

The **red tomato** is listed on most nutritional lists as a superfood. It is packed with the antioxidant vitamins A and C, potassium and the B vitamins for heart health, and above all a powerful carotenoid called **lycopene**. This phytonutrient, which is responsible for the bright red color of tomatoes, has been studied for its role in fighting various cancers, and its ability to lower cholesterol. When tomatoes are cooked, even more lycopene is made available. Lycopene has been shown to be especially effective when eaten with fat-rich foods such as avocado, olive oil, or nuts. There are the ingredients for a powerhouse salad!

Yellow tomatoes have valuable amounts of **beta-carotene**, the pigment that gives orange and yellow tomatoes their color and helps neutralize free radicals that may damage our cells. Besides a good dose of vitamin C, yellow tomatoes have more niacin and folate than other tomatoes and offer a good level of potassium, important for regulating blood pressure, nerve function, and muscle control.

The skin of **purple tomatoes** boasts high levels of **anthocyanins**, disease-fighting compounds that help fight cancer, reduce inflammation, and slow the aging process.