Tomayto, Tomahto

Whichever way you choose to pronounce it, we can all agree that tomatoes are nutritious and delicious. Can you believe that this plant from the nightshade family was once avoided, due to the widespread belief that it was poisonous? Though a tomato is botanically a berry, it is popularly recognized as a vegetable. No matter how you slice it, a single cup of tomatoes contains only 30 calories and is a good source of Vitamins C and K and minerals copper, potassium and manganese. Common tomato varieties include grape, cherry, heirloom and beefsteak. Their carotenoid (antioxidant) content is based on color and ripeness. Read below to see how this superfood enhances health from head to toe(mato).

**HEART HEALTH**

These red beauties are heart healthy. Tomato consumption has been associated with lower risk of cardiovascular disease, possibly due to their high potassium and lycopene content.

**CANCER**

Current research suggests that lycopene’s antioxidant properties may provide a protective effect against certain cancers including breast, colorectal and prostate cancers.

**LYCOPENE**

Tomatoes are one of the sole sources of lycopene, an antioxidant that gives tomatoes their rich red color. Heat-processed tomato products, including spaghetti sauce and ketchup, deliver more lycopene than the equivalent amount of fresh tomatoes. Heat breaks down the cell walls of tomatoes, thus making lycopene more readily available. Lycopene is also fat soluble, and more easily absorbed if eaten with foods containing fat. Add a little olive or canola oil to your favorite tomato-based dishes to reap the full benefits of lycopene.

**Did you Know?**

The original Rutgers tomato, introduced in 1934, was recently recreated during Rutgers' 250th year thanks to preservation of the historic seeds by the Campbell Soup Company!

**I Like-opene Tomatoes**

Revised by: Dana Ikeda
Reviewed by: Salome P. Rao, Ph.D., RD, Dept. of Nutritional Sciences

References:

Questions? Like us on Facebook (RU Healthy Dining Team), follow us on Twitter (@ru_hdt), Instagram (@ru_hdt), Snapchat (ru_hdt) or email peggyd@dining.rutgers.edu.