

The Health Benefits of Tomato and Tomato Products

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Key Points

- Tomatoes contain lycopene, which provides health benefits.
- Tomatoes contain vitamins A, C, and K and are a good source of niacin, chromium, and potassium.

Tomatoes and Tomato Products

Some people are confused about whether a tomato is a fruit or a vegetable. Strictly speaking, a tomato is a fruit because fruits are formed from the ovary in the base of the flower and contain the seeds of the plant. However, when it comes to cooking, a tomato may be considered a vegetable because it is used in the cooking of savory dishes. Regardless, you cannot overlook the health benefits tomatoes provide. Tomato and tomato products include:

- Fresh tomatoes
- Tomato sauce
- Tomato paste
- Ketchup
- Tomato soups
- Tomato juice

Nutrients

Tomatoes contain vitamins A, C, and K. Tomatoes are also a good source of niacin, chromium, and

potassium. Vitamin C protects the body from free radicals which destroy the healthy cells in the body. Niacin helps to lower triglyceride, a fat present in our blood.

Tomatoes are also rich in lycopene, a compound that gives tomatoes their color. Processed tomato products have higher concentrations of lycopene. Studies show that tomato and tomato product consumption is associated with a reduced risk of:

- Ovarian cancer, especially in premenopausal women
- Digestive tract cancers (mouth, throat, esophagus, pancreas, colon and rectum)
- Cardiovascular disease

How to Purchase Tomatoes and Tomato Products

Avoid soft or mushy tomatoes with blemishes. Cherry tomatoes are small round tomatoes. Grape tomatoes are small and oblong shaped with a concentrated flavor. Roma tomatoes are an oblong shape, medium size with shiny red skin and firm flesh. Round or Globe tomatoes are round with shiny red skin and firm flesh.

When purchasing tomato products, check the expiration dates on the containers. Choose containers free of damage, such as dented cans.

Storing Tomatoes

Tomatoes should not be refrigerated. Tomatoes should be stored above 50°F to avoid flavor and quality loss. Handle with care to avoid bruising. Tomato products should be stored at room temperature unless the container states otherwise.

Preparing Tomatoes

Tomatoes may be consumed fresh or cooked. To peel, cut a small “x” at base of tomato and dip in boiling water briefly then place tomato in ice water. The skin will wrinkle and you will be able to remove it easily.

How to Eat More Tomatoes Daily

- Serve tomatoes fresh as a snack.
- Serve tomatoes in omelets.
- Add tomatoes to sandwiches and wraps.
- Add tomatoes to stews and soups.
- Make tomato sauce and serve with pasta.
- Drink tomato juice.
- Make salsa.
- Preserve tomatoes when in season.

A Point of Caution

Canned tomato products such as tomato sauce, juice, or paste can be a high source of sodium in the diet. Try purchasing low sodium varieties of these products.

Buying Kentucky Proud is easy. Look for the label at your grocery store, farmers' market, or roadside stand.



Tomato Basil Bruschetta

Ingredients

- 3 plum tomatoes, chopped
- 1/3 cup thinly sliced and coarsely chopped onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh basil or 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground pepper
- 1 pound loaf, whole wheat French bread, cut into 1/2 inch slices

Directions

- Combine tomatoes, onions, garlic, red wine vinegar, 2 tablespoons olive oil, basil, oregano, salt and pepper; set aside.
- Preheat broiler of oven.
- Lightly brush both sides of bread slices with remaining olive oil and arrange on ungreased baking sheet.
- Place three to four inches from the broiler and heat slices for two to three minutes on each side or until golden brown.
- Top each slice with tomato mixture, using a slotted spoon and serve.

Yield: 16 half-inch slices

Nutritional Analysis: 140 calories, 5 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 250 mg sodium, 19 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 0 g sugar, 4 g protein.

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