

## AND NOW A WORD FROM THE DOCTOR...

### **The Humble Tomato**

By David Perlmutter, MD, FACN



The ever-popular tomato has been the focus of extensive research over the past 15 years...and with good reason. Tomatoes are rich in lycopene, a powerful antioxidant and a member of the carotene family, which contains more than 400 different molecules including alpha-carotene, beta-carotene (the one most commonly found in supplements), lutein, and lycopene.

Lycopene imparts red color to a number of foods, including tomatoes, guava, watermelon, and pink grapefruit. The concentration of lycopene in body tissue tends to be higher than that of all other carotenoids. While cooking and processing most fruits and vegetables reduces the level of various nutrients, most notably vitamin C and the B vitamins, cooking and processing tomatoes actually increases lycopene's bioavailability (the rate at which it enters the bloodstream and circulates to specific organs and tissues) by releasing it from the vegetable fiber. In fact, lycopene in tomato paste or ketchup is four times more bioavailable than that found in fresh tomatoes.

Because lycopene is a fat-soluble molecule, serving tomatoes in foods containing fat such as spaghetti sauce, lasagna, or pizza greatly increases the absorption of lycopene. In addition, because 70% of the brain is made of fat, lycopene is an ideal brain-protective antioxidant, protecting the brain against the damaging effects of free radicals that can often damage human cells. This explains why high levels of lycopene, along with other antioxidants, has been associated with a reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease as well as lessened risk of macular degeneration, cardiovascular disease, and cancers of the breast, lung, bladder, digestive tract, and skin.

So it's time to look upon the humble tomato with more respect. Adding tomato products to your diet can go a long way towards better health.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David".