

# HEALTHFUL EATING



## Lycopene Offers A Number Of Health Benefits

(NAPSA)—At a recent conference, sponsored by the Center for Food and Nutrition Policy (CFNP) at Virginia Technical Institute, in Washington, D.C., researchers reported that they are finding more health benefits of lycopene, a pigment that gives many fruits and vegetables their red color.

Previous research has found that the benefits of lycopene appear to affect parts of the body where lycopene concentration is highest, such as in the prostate gland. New research suggests a potential benefit for bone and skin health and male infertility.

Lycopene is an antioxidant, which appears to prevent the formation of harmful by-products of metabolism called free radicals. Free radicals are thought to be responsible for damaging the body's cells, as well as their genetic makeup, leading to certain chronic diseases.

One researcher at the conference, Dr. Leticia Rao from the University of Toronto, explained that lycopene's function as an antioxidant prevents free radicals from disrupting the balance of new bone formation with the bone loss that naturally occurs with age. When that balance is thrown off, bone loss exceeds bone formation, causing the brittle bone disease osteoporosis.

Another researcher, Dr. Yoav Sharoni of Ben-Gurion University, reported that oral lycopene had a protective effect against UV skin damage, which suggested a potential inverse connection between lycopene and skin cancer. He explained that while sunscreens provide external protection from damaging UV rays, antioxidants like lycopene in the diet might provide internal protection from sunburn.

Dr. Narmada Gupta of the All India Institute of Medicine found low levels of lycopene in the testes of men who showed signs of infertility. Dr. Gupta worked with 30 men to see if supplementation with lycopene would improve fer-



**Lycopene-rich foods, such as tomatoes and watermelon, may be a nutritious way to help prevent chronic disease.**

tility. Results indicated reduced levels of free radicals, increased sperm concentration and movement and improved pregnancy rates among the participants.

Lycopene is readily available in tomatoes, tomato sauces, watermelon, and other red fruits and vegetables. Lycopene absorption is enhanced when tomatoes are heated, especially in combination with olive oil or other fats, making processed tomato products like tomato sauce and paste excellent sources of the nutrient. Lycopene is also available as a dietary supplement in a single-nutrient form and some multivitamins.

Because of the availability and affordability of lycopene-rich foods, lycopene could potentially provide tremendous benefit for Americans. However, 40 percent of Americans do not consume a single tomato product on any given day, according to Rich Forshee at CFNP. In fact, average consumption is low and even more pronounced among African Americans.

Scientists agree more research is needed to determine lycopene's true preventative potential and to learn whether lycopene works best as a single nutrient, or in synergy with other nutrients naturally found in food. In the meantime, adding lycopene to your diet may help fight free radicals and maintain long-term health.