

Tomatoes may help ward off heart disease

May 18 2011



Credit: Karolina Grabowska from Pexels

(Medical Xpress) -- A University of Adelaide study has shown that tomatoes may be an effective alternative to medication in lowering cholesterol and blood pressure, thus preventing cardiovascular disease.

A paper published by Dr. Karin Ried in the international journal

[Maturitas](#) reveals [clinical evidence](#) that a bright red pigment called lycopene found in [tomatoes](#) and to a lesser extent in watermelon, guava, papaya, pink grapefruit and rosehip has antioxidant properties that are vital to good health.

Dr. Ried and her colleague Dr. Peter Fakler from the Discipline of General Practice are the first to summarise the effect of lycopene on cholesterol and [blood pressure](#), analysing the collective results of 14 studies in the last 55 years.

"Our study suggests that if more than 25 milligrams of lycopene is taken daily, it can reduce LDL-cholesterol by up to 10%," Dr. Ried says.

Tomatoes in particular have high levels of lycopene, with half a liter of tomato juice taken daily, or 50 grams of tomato paste, providing protection against heart disease.

"That's comparable to the effect of low doses of medication commonly prescribed for people with slightly elevated cholesterol, but without the side effects of these drugs, which can include muscle pain and weakness and [nerve damage](#)."

Dr. Ried says lycopene is better absorbed in processed and cooked tomatoes or tomato paste rather than fresh tomatoes. As a supplement, lycopene is available in soft gelatine capsules or tablets.

"Research shows that high lycopene consumption has been associated with a decreased [risk of cardiovascular disease](#), including hardened arteries, heart attacks and strokes."

Dr. Ried says more research is needed to explore whether doses higher than 25-44 milligrams of lycopene a day provide additional benefits.

The study was funded by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing.

Dr. Ried and her colleagues have received international recognition for other clinical studies which show the benefits of both garlic and dark chocolate in helping to lower blood pressure.

Provided by University of Adelaide

Citation: Tomatoes may help ward off heart disease (2011, May 18) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-05-tomatoes-ward-heart-disease.html>

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