



## Lycopene as an Antioxidant: Source and its Health Benefits

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### Description

Lycopene is a powerful antioxidant with many health benefits, including sun protection, improved heart health, and a lower risk of certain types of cancer. Tomatoes are a major food source of the antioxidant lycopene, which has been linked to many health benefits, including reducing the risk of heart disease and cancer. They are also a great source of vitamin C, potassium, folic acid and vitamin K.

### Sources of lycopene

Here are some excellent sources of lycopene;

- 1 cup canned tomato sauce: 37 milligrams
- 1 wedge of raw watermelon: 13 milligrams
- 1 tablespoon canned tomato paste: 3 milligrams
- 1 tablespoon of ketchup: 2.5 milligrams
- 1 tablespoon salsa: 1.7 milligrams

### Health benefits

The main health benefit of lycopene is its antioxidant function. Antioxidants are molecules that fight free radicals in our body. Free radicals naturally accumulate in response to aging, but their levels increase due to environmental and behavioural factors such as pollution and smoking.

Free radicals cause cell damage at high levels; this damage is linked to a variety of health conditions, including cancer, diabetes and heart disease. By stabilizing these free radicals, researchers believe that lycopene may reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases. While research is on-going, lycopene may also support good oral health, bone health, and blood pressure. In addition, lycopene is thought to have these other health benefits:

**Reduced cancer risk:** Although more research is needed, studies have found a link between lycopene intake and cancer prevention, especially bone, lung, and prostate cancer. Experimental studies have shown that lycopene slows or stops the growth of cancer cells. This effect is believed to be due to lycopene's uniquely

powerful anti-oxidant abilities. Because it is not converted to vitamin A in our bodies like most carotenoids, scientists believe that its antioxidant properties are enhanced, helping to reduce cell damage that can lead to cancer.

**Heart health:** A recent study found that lycopene lowers bad cholesterol while increasing good cholesterol. This balance is important because high cholesterol creates fatty deposits in our arteries that can clot and lead to heart attacks or strokes. In addition, lycopene can help maintain good blood pressure and further reduce the risk of heart disease.

**Improved fertility in men:** A recent study found that consuming 14 milligrams of lycopene per day can improve fertility in healthy young men by about 40 percent.

**Pain relief:** Lycopene has been shown to reduce pain to a similar extent as the drug ibuprofen. Several studies have looked at its effects on nerve pain, which is traditionally very difficult to treat. Results in animals are promising, showing significant levels of reduction in pain and hypersensitivity from lycopene intake.

### Safety and side effects

**Allergies:** Although tomato allergy is rare, individuals allergic to grass pollen are likely to be allergic to tomatoes. This condition is called pollen and food allergy syndrome or oral allergy syndrome.

In oral allergy syndrome, your immune system attacks fruit and vegetable proteins that are similar to pollen, leading to allergic reactions such as an itchy mouth, scratchy throat, or swelling of the mouth or throat. People with latex allergies may also experience cross-reactivity to tomatoes. Tomatoes are juicy and sweet, full of antioxidants and can help fight several diseases. They are especially high in lycopene, a plant compound linked to improving heart health, preventing cancer and protecting against sunburn. Tomatoes can be a valuable part of a healthy diet.