If you have a garden, your tomatoes are probably living their best life right about now as they tend to ripen toward the end of summer. This is your friendly reminder not to let any of that fruit-disguised-as-a-veggie go to waste this year. This is because tomatoes are an often-overlooked nutritional powerhouse. “Tomatoes are one of those foods that everyone takes for granted,” says [Jonny Bowden, Ph.D., C.N.S.](https://jonnybowden.com/), author of 15 books, including his latest, [*Smart Fat: Eat More Fat, Lose More Weight, Get Healthy Now!*](https://www.amazon.com/Smart-Fat-More-Weight-Healthy/dp/0062392298?ots=1&linkCode=ogi&tag=goodhousekeeping_auto-append-20&ascsubtag=%5bartid|10055.a.33339185%5bsrc|%5bch|%5blt|)“But everyone eats them—even those who claim to hate fruits and vegetables.”

**FYI on the healthiest way to eat tomatoes:**“Tomatoes are one of those few foods that are *more*nutritious when cooked—although they’re still pretty darn nutritious right off the vine,” says Bowden. “Cooking them actually releases the lycopene!” In fact, [research shows](https://academic.oup.com/jn/article/135/5/1226/4663991) that 100 mg of raw tomato has 2,573 mcg of lycopene while 100 mg of tomato sauce has 15,152 mcg.

Read on to find out the amazing health benefits of tomatoes.

**Tomatoes may improve your heart health.**

In terms of the nutrients in tomatoes, “number one with a bullet is lycopene, a natural antioxidant that gives tomatoes their nice red color,” says Bowden. [Research shows](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5974099/) that lycopene affects the cardiovascular system in a number of ways. Among them, it helps control [blood pressure](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21138408/); prevent atherosclerosis; lower LDL cholesterol and triglycerides while promoting the synthesis of dysfunction HDL particles.

**Tomatoes may lower your cancer risk.**

“Lycopene got a lot of attention in [the famous ‘pizza study](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/11880478/)' of 2002,” says Bowden. “Researchers found that men who ate pizza twice or more a week reduced their risk for prostate cancer by 23%, a fact that did not go unnoticed in dormitories everywhere. The scientists believe the effect came from the lycopene in the tomato sauce.” Since then, [other research has emerged](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3850026/) that shows there may be a link between tomato consumption and a lower risk of ovarian, gastric, pancreatic, and prostate cancers.

## ****Tomatoes can give you a vitamin boost.****

“Tomatoes are a good source of vitamin C and potassium, both of which most people need more of,” notes Bowden. “Interesting factoid: gram for gram, tomato puree has more potassium than fresh tomatoes, and tomato pastehas twice the potassium of the puree! Nonetheless, tomatoes in general are considered a high-potassium food.” For comparison, [a medium tomato](https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/fdc-app.html#/food-details/787683/nutrients) has 292 mg of potassium while [a medium banana](https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/fdc-app.html#/food-details/786652/nutrients) has 422 mg.

## ****Tomatoes may reduce the effects of diabetes.****

Vegetables and fruit are always smart to include on your plate if you have diabetes. However, [research has found](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10942912.2018.1439959) that tomatoes actually seem to lower the oxidative stress, inflammation, atherosclerosis, and tissue damage that diabetes triggers. Having a tomato at lunch probably won’t immediately lower your sugar levels, but the long-term protective properties are not to be ignored.

## ****Tomatoes can help you stay regular.****

As with most produce, tomatoes are a good source of fiber—one medium one contains 1.5 g. Fiber helps keep food moving through your digestive system so that you have regular bowel movements. It also can leave you feeling fuller for longer after a meal than other types of food like refined carbohydrates, which can be a boon for weight loss.

## ****Tomatoes can protect your skin.****

[Studies have found](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5506060/) that eating tomatoes may reduce UV damage to skin and lower the risk of sunburn. Researchers believe it may be due to tomatoes’ high content of carotenoids (one of which is the superstar lycopene). Of course, just because you had a [caprese salad](https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/food-recipes/easy/a44232/caprese-bites-recipe/) last night doesn’t mean you can forgo sunscreen at the beach today. Continue to wear a [broad-spectrum SPF of at least 30](https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/beauty/anti-aging/g1288/best-sunscreens/) when you’re in the sun and consider the added protection from tomatoes to be a bonus.

## ****Tomatoes can safeguard your vision.****

If you need one more reason to eat more lycopene-rich foods, studies have linked lycopene consumption to a lower risk of developing [age-related macular degeneration](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21508112/) and [potentially cataracts](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12921892/). While you’re stocking up on tomatoes, grab some eggs and green leafy vegetables, both of which contain [lutein and zeaxanthin](https://www.aoa.org/patients-and-public/caring-for-your-vision/diet-and-nutrition/lutein)—two other eye-healthy carotenoids.

[KAITLYN PIRIE](https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/author/222438/Kaitlyn-Pirie/)Sr. EditorKaitlyn started her career as a reporter in the research department at Real Simple and went on to become a health editor at Family Circle before joining the Hearst team.