



## Tips For Eating More Fruits And Vegetables TOMATOES

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The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommend that adults eat 1 ½–2 cups of fruits and 2–3 cups of vegetables a day to reduce the risk for diet-related chronic diseases. However, only 1 in 10 Americans eat the recommended amounts of fruits or vegetables.<sup>1</sup> There are many different ways to add a variety of fruits and vegetables to your diet. This publication focuses on tomatoes and provides tips on how select, store, prepare and preserve them.

### Shopping Tips<sup>2</sup>

- Look for tomatoes with smooth skin and bright, even color.
- Ripe tomatoes should give just a little to the touch, but don't squeeze them because they bruise easily.
- Canned tomatoes are also a healthy choice for making soups, sauces and casseroles. Look for cans that are "low" or "reduced" sodium.

### How To Clean And Store<sup>2,3</sup>

- Store whole tomatoes stem-side down at room temperature and away from sunlight for several days. Do not store whole tomatoes in the refrigerator, as it will change the taste.
- If the tomatoes are not ripe, store them in a paper bag with an apple to speed up ripening.
- Keep chopped or prepared tomatoes in the refrigerator for up to two days.



## How To Prepare<sup>2</sup>

- Tomatoes can be baked, broiled, boiled, stewed, grilled, roasted, sautéed, dried or eaten raw.
- Before slicing a tomato, wash it well with cool water. Remove the stem and core.
- Try adding tomatoes to your favorite sandwich. Add sliced tomatoes to a grilled cheese.
- For an easy summer salad, drizzle olive oil over sliced tomatoes and basil leaves. Sprinkle salt and pepper on top.



## How To Preserve<sup>4,5,6</sup>

- Freezing: Wash the tomatoes and dip them in boiling water for 30 seconds to blister the skins. Allow them to cool, and then remove the skins and core them. Cut them into your preferred size, or leave them whole, and freeze them on a baking sheet. Once they are fully frozen, move them to plastic bags. The sealed bags can be stored in the freezer for up to a year. Add the date on the bag to ensure use before the year mark.
- Drying: Wash the tomatoes and cut into halves or quarters (depending on the size). Dip the slices in a mixture of equal parts water and lemon juice to kill any germs, and then drain well. Follow a tested recipe to dry using an oven or dehydrator. Always store dried foods inside sealed jars or bags in a cool, dry place. Dried tomatoes will keep for 6 to 12 months.
- Canning: Can or pickle tomatoes as whole fruits, slices, sauces, or pastes. Since tomatoes are mostly acidic, they can be safely canned using either the water bath or pressure method with the addition of lemon juice or citric acid. For safety, follow only expert-tested recipes, such as those in the *USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning*.
- Ask your local Cooperative Extension office for more detailed information about safely preserving tomatoes, or visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation at <https://nchfp.uga.edu/>

## Why Tomatoes Are Healthy<sup>7,8,9</sup>

Tomatoes contain many nutrients your body needs to be healthy:

- Vitamin A: Maintains good vision, support cell growth and keep skin healthy. [10% DV]
- Vitamin C: Helps the body heal from bumps and bruises and fight infection. [30% DV]
- Vitamin K: Helps blood to clot and wounds to heal. [14% DV]

*All % Daily Values are based on a serving size of one cup.*



## How They Are Grown<sup>10</sup>

- Tomatoes grow best in warm weather.
- New gardeners might find it easier to plant seedlings when growing tomatoes. More advanced home gardeners may choose to start from seeds indoors then move outside after the danger of freezing has passed.
- Plant tomatoes in loose, well-fertilized soil and water regularly to keep the soil around the roots moist.



## Fun Facts<sup>11</sup>

- For many years, tomatoes were thought to be poisonous by Europeans because they are related to the highly toxic belladonna plant.
- Every year the average American eats over 22 pounds of tomatoes!
- Although tomatoes are fruits, the United States Supreme Court declared them to be vegetables in 1893 for tax reasons.



## Botanical Information<sup>10</sup>

- Tomatoes are fruits of the plant *Solanum lycopersicum*.
- Tomato plants are herbaceous, or non-woody, plants that produce vines as they grow. Some garden varieties will grow into bushes instead of vines.
- Tomato plants are perennial, meaning they live longer than just one growing season. However, many people grow them as annuals, replanting new plants each year.
- Heirloom tomato varieties are older breeds that show unique traits in fruit color and shape.

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