

# HOW TO EAT TOMATOES

Naturopath **MERYN WAKELIN** finds health and happiness in home grown harvests.

**F**resh, ripe, raw tomatoes are bursting with goodness – anti-oxidants, enzymes, vitamins and minerals galore, particularly potassium, niacin, vitamin B6 and folate. They are low in kilojoules and high in dietary fibre.

Tomatoes, like most foods, are at their very best eaten seasonally. They may be available year-round, but who really wants to eat a floury, tasteless tomato served in the middle of winter? Eat fresh ripe tomatoes that have been grown outdoors in the fullness of summer and preferably fully ripened on the vine. Grow enough to preserve them by dehydrating and storing in extra virgin olive oil, or make a beautiful home-made tomato sauce, tomato purée or chutney to bottle or freeze. Tomatoes, whether raw, cooked or preserved for winter food, are worth eating several times a week, throughout the year, for their wonderful health giving goodness.

Though they should absolutely be enjoyed fresh, red tomatoes number among the foods that give us added health benefits when cooked. Lycopene, a carotenoid responsible for the red pigment in tomatoes, is a strong antioxidant which has shown promise in fighting cancer (particularly prostate, but also breast, bowel, cervix, bladder and lung) as well as preventing the oxidisation of cholesterol and

thereby fighting atherosclerosis. Lycopene also increases the SPF of our skin, so is a sunscreen aid from the inside!

Lycopene is much more bio-available to us when cooked and your body also absorbs it better when you pair it with a good quality fat – so feel really good about adding butter or extra virgin olive oil, nut, or avocado oil when you are cooking/eating tomatoes! A few nuts or some cheese with your lycopene rich meal, will also do the trick. But remember once any fruit or vegetable is cooked, vitamins and enzymes do get damaged/destroyed, so a balance between raw and cooked is always good practice in a healthy diet.

About 22 milligrams of lycopene is an ideal daily dose for preventative health. One medium sized fresh tomato contains about 3mg of lycopene. Half a cup of cooked tomato purée has 27mg. And if you'd like a break from tomatoes, watermelon is also high in lycopene.

Finally, a word of caution. Tomatoes are from the Solanaceae (nightshade) family. This family of foods also includes potatoes, eggplant, capsicums, chilli, and tamarillos. Some people are intolerant to the solanins in these foods, often those with arthritis, in which case they should be avoided. 🌱

Meryn Wakelin is a qualified naturopath and nutrition consultant.  
www.healnaturally.co.nz



## BRUCHETTA

(pronounced brrru-shetta)

This is an Italian classic and my favourite way to eat sweet and tasty home grown vine ripened tomatoes. You can taste the sun as the fresh juices dribble gently through your finger tips that then have to be licked and sucked clean! Well you can't possibly waste a drop of that goodness can you?!

### RECIPE

**Chop up the equivalent of 2-3 medium sized tomatoes with a sharp knife into pieces roughly a centimetre square. Place in a bowl and gently stir in 1 clove of crushed garlic, a few basil leaves that have been thinly sliced, a pinch of salt, freshly ground pepper and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil. Serve piled onto toasted bread of your choice.**



# PHOSTROGEN



## INSALATA CAPRESE

This would have to be a close and joyful second after a trip to my local farmers market to purchase fresh buffalo mozzarella. This is also a classic Italian starter.

### RECIPE

Not too thin slices of the buffalo mozzarella are layered with not too thin slices of fresh tomato and in between each, a delicate leaf of fresh basil (which loves to grow among tomato plants). When it's all laid out spectacularly on the platter sprinkle over a beautiful extra virgin olive oil, some fresh ground pepper and a very light sprinkle of salt – that's it!

## HEALTHY HOMEMADE KETCHUP

Tomato sauce is a staple in most families. The trouble with the bought stuff is that it usually contains a huge amount of sugar. Make your own and you can control the amount of sugar or avoid refined sugar altogether. Your late summer surplus of ripe tomatoes can be frozen in bags until you have time to turn them into sauce. For a delicious sugar-free recipe go to [www.gogardening.co.nz](http://www.gogardening.co.nz)

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