

JOEL FUHRMAN, MD

Tomatoes protect against stroke, heart attack

Carotenoids are a family of over 600 phytochemicals, including alpha-carotene, beta-carotene, lycopene, lutein and zeaxanthin. Carotenoids are abundant in green and yellow-orange vegetables and fruits and help to defend the body's tissues against oxidative damage, which is a natural byproduct of our metabolic processes; oxidative damage from free radicals contributes to chronic diseases and aging.

Lycopene is the signature carotenoid of the tomato. The lycopene in the American diet is 85 percent derived from tomatoes. Lycopene is found circulating in the blood and also concentrates in the male reproductive system, hence its protective effects against prostate cancer.

In the skin, lycopene helps to prevent UV damage from the sun, protecting against skin cancer. Lycopene is known for its anti-cancer properties, but did you know that lycopene has also been intensively studied for its beneficial cardiovascular effects?

Many observational studies have made a connection between higher blood lycopene and lower risk of heart attack.

For example, a study in men found that low serum lycopene was associated with increased plaque in the

carotid artery and triple the risk of cardiovascular events compared to higher levels. In a separate study, women were split into four groups (quartiles) according to their blood lycopene levels; women in the top three quartiles were 50 percent less likely to have cardiovascular disease compared to the lowest quartile.

A 2004, analysis from the Physicians' Health Study data found a 39 percent decrease in stroke risk in men with the highest blood levels of lycopene.

Data from an ongoing study in Finland has strengthened these findings with similar results. One-thousand men had their blood carotenoid levels tested and were followed for 12 years. Those with the highest lycopene levels had the lowest risk of stroke — they were 55 percent less likely to have a stroke than those with the lowest lycopene levels.

Previous data from this same group of men found that higher lycopene levels were associated with lower risk of heart attack as well. A meta-analysis of 12 trials also found that daily supplemental tomato products (approximately 1 cup of tomato juice or 3-4 tbsp. of tomato paste) reduced LDL cholesterol by 10 percent — this effect is comparable to low doses of statin drugs (with no risk of side effects,

of course).

Of course, lycopene is not the only nutrient in tomatoes — tomatoes are also rich in vitamins C and E, beta-carotene, and flavonol antioxidants just to name a few. Single antioxidants usually don't exert their protective effects alone; we learned this lesson from clinical trials of beta-carotene, vitamin C, and vitamin E supplements, which did not reduce cardiovascular disease risk.

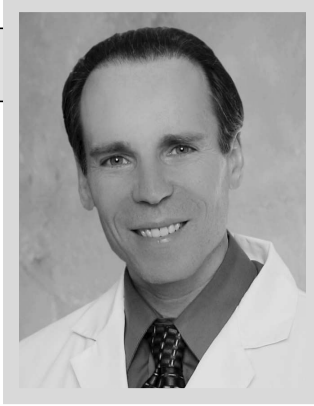
It is the interactions between phytochemicals in the complex synergistic network contained in plant foods that is responsible for their health effects, and this is something that we cannot replicate in a pill.

Out of all the common dietary carotenoids, lycopene has the most potent antioxidant power, but combinations of carotenoids are even more effective than any single carotenoid — they work synergistically.

Blood lycopene, as used in many of these studies, is simply a marker for high tomato product intake; similarly high alpha-carotene and beta-carotene levels are markers of high green and yellow-orange fruit and vegetable intake.

Colorful fruits and vegetables provide significant protection.

In a given year, a typical American will eat about 92 pounds of tomatoes.



Enjoy those 92 pounds and even add some more. Add fresh, juicy raw tomatoes to your salad, diced or unsulphured sun-dried tomatoes to soups, and enjoy homemade tomato sauces and soups.

Be mindful of the sodium content of ketchup and other tomato products — choose the low sodium or no salt added versions. No salt added, unsulphured dried tomatoes are also great.

Diced and crushed tomatoes in glass jars are preferable to those in cans, to avoid the endocrine disruptor BPA. Also keep in mind that carotenoids are absorbed best when accompanied by healthy fats — for example, in a salad with a seed or nut-based dressing.

Lycopene is also more absorbable when tomatoes are cooked, so enjoy a variety of both raw and cooked tomatoes in your daily diet.

Dr. Fuhrman is a New York Times best-selling author and board certified family physician specializing in lifestyle and nutritional medicine.

Visit his website at DrFuhrman.com, or submit questions and comments to newsquestions@drfuhrman.com.

Free documentary to spotlight repeal of ACA

With the future of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in serious doubt, millions may lose their health insurance, with Medicare and Medicaid benefits potentially downsized or drastically cut.

Florence area Democrats have been sponsoring a series of community-wide healthcare meetings concerning these issues. The next meeting will be Sunday, Feb. 26, from 2 to 4 p.m. in the Bromley Room of the Siuslaw Public Library.

The meeting will feature a screening of the new documentary, "Now Is the Time: Healthcare for Everybody," by Laurie Simons and Terry Sterrenberg, with music composed by Clifford J. Tasner.

This documentary explains how the Affordable Care Act can be replaced with some-

thing better, that costs less and covers everyone with better health outcomes.

The film explains what Medicare-for-All Single Payer healthcare is, how it saves money, what has been keeping lawmakers from providing healthcare for everyone in the U.S., and what can be done about it.

This documentary gives an opportunity to look at another option for healthcare that has not been given much consideration as an alternative to the current system.

The screening is free and open to the public. There will be a discussion after the film led by representatives from Healthcare for All Oregon.

For more information, contact Pat Reno at 541-991-0557.

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Annual job fair to provide employment opportunities

Three Rivers Casino Resort will host a community job fair Thursday, March 23, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., in the casino's Event Center.

The job fair will offer the opportunity to connect with representatives from 33 different employers. Attendance is free and all ages are welcome.

"We are honored to host the community job fair again this year in our Event Center," said Mike Rose, COO at Three Rivers Casino Resort. "It's a privilege to be involved in an event that provides employment opportunities to our community."

The fair will offer resources for guidance to a great career. Participants will have access to numerous local employers all in one convenient place. The job fair will feature on-hand assistance to job seekers provided by Worksource Lane (Employment Department).

"Local businesses and applicants both know the challenges when applying for jobs and locating resources as well.

"The Community Job Fair brings all those parties and resources together to form a network in our local community. It's a 'one stop shopping' event that is free and open to the public — an opportunity to meet one-on-one with locals who are currently hiring and actively recruiting for the upcoming season," said Pam Hickson, Recruitment Specialist for Three Rivers Casino Resort/Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians.

Gain access to a range of diverse jobs represented from full time, part time and others.

For more information, contact Pam Hickson at 541-902-6504.

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