

Tomato Wellness Council

Canned Tomatoes ARE Healthy!

There's lots of confusing information out there on whether canned (or bottled) tomatoes are really healthful. Issues such as BPA, organics, GMOs, and preservation come up for many health-minded consumers. Here are the facts.

Canned Tomatoes are Healthful.

For centuries, home cooks have been preserving vegetables from their gardens to extend the life of nutritious vegetables and fruits throughout the year. It's an important part of our culinary past; it helped us survive nutritional deficiencies and fight disease. And today, food companies have taken over that job for us, by offering an array of carefully preserved vegetable, including tomatoes. By turning to canned tomatoes, you can enjoy their nutritious contribution of vitamin C, fiber, potassium, and the antioxidant, lycopene all year long. In fact, the lycopene is more bioavailable in the form of canned tomatoes vs. fresh tomatoes. Plus, enjoying canned tomatoes—harvested at their flavor and nutrition peak—during the off-season is a much more sustainable choice than fresh tomatoes, which must be shipped long distances.

Addressing Concerns Over BPA

Many concerns have arisen over the safety of Bisphenol A (BPA), the chemical used in the lining of cans. The FDA assessed the safety of BPA in 2012 and stated,

“The Food and Drug Administration’s assessment is that the scientific evidence at this time does not suggest that the very low levels of human exposure to BPA through the diet are unsafe. The agency has performed extensive research on BPA, has reviewed hundreds of other studies, and is continuing to address questions and potential concerns raised by certain studies.”

More research is needed to understand BPA’s health effects; a FDA National Toxicology Program research initiative is expected to conclude in 2015. The FDA encourages the food industry to explore alternatives to BPA. Indeed, the tomato industry has been committed to seeking alternatives, and some companies have switched to BPA-free linings. However, BPA alternatives have not been widely tested and may pose safety concerns too. It's important to consider that linings were developed to avoid the pitting of cans and the introduction of foreign materials into our foods. Most health experts stress that the healthy antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits of eating vegetables far exceeds the current risk of BPA exposure. If you are concerned about limiting your exposure to BPA, you can seek BPA-free linings, or choose products canned in jars, tubs, or pouches, or boxes.

Organics vs. Conventional

Is conventionally grown produce dangerous to consume? That's a question that weighs on many minds. Data show that our conventional produce contains levels of synthetic pesticide residues well below the safety thresholds established by the government. However, organic produce does contain lower levels of synthetic pesticide residues. Conventional and organic production can support a sustainable view of agriculture. But most health experts suggest that eating an abundant supply of fruits and vegetables—regardless of whether they are organic or conventional—should be your primary goal. If you choose to support organic agriculture, it's your personal choice. There are plenty of organic tomato products—pasta sauce, canned tomatoes, salsas, ketchup, and soup—to meet your needs.

No GMO Tomatoes

GMOs (genetically modified organisms) are a hot topic today. GMOs are plants that have been genetically engineered with DNA from bacteria, viruses, or other plants. These plants are engineered to withstand herbicides or to produce insecticides, in most cases. Most GMO plants are used to produce highly processed ingredients (i.e., oil, high fructose corn syrup), biofuel, or animal feed. But there are a few whole plant foods, such as corn, papayas, and zucchini on the market that can be GMO. So, are there any GMO tomatoes on the market today? The answer is *no*. Although a GMO tomato was developed in 1994, it was quickly removed from the market, and no GMO tomatoes are currently being grown commercially in North America or Europe.