



School Nutrition Newsletter June 2017

Produce of the Month: Tomatoes

by Katherine Ancona, R.D.

Summer is just around the corner and that means that tomatoes are now in season! There are hundreds of different tomato varieties; all are different in flavor, texture, and appearance. This month at Whitsons, we are highlighting tomatoes, their nutritional value and dishes where tomatoes are the main ingredient. We select the best tomatoes for our dishes daily, so make sure to try our tips on selecting the right tomatoes for your next meal.

How to Choose a Tomato

Tomatoes that are plump and heavy with smooth skins that do not have any bruises, cracks, or discolorations are the best choice. Select tomatoes with rich colors; the deep reds, bright oranges, vibrant yellows, and rich purples. These are not only packed with flavor but also contain the most nutrients! Tomatoes that are ripe are fragrant. If they do not have a fragrant smell then they were most likely picked before they were ready and will not ripen. Tomatoes that are also soft to touch are ripened and will need to be eaten immediately. Over ripened tomatoes are best used for sauces and stews.

Storage

Tomatoes can be stored at room temperature away from any type of direct sunlight. They should only be refrigerated if you do not anticipate use within a week; tomatoes taste their best at room temperature. Colder temperatures tend to stop tomatoes from ripening and will affect the taste.

Nutritional Benefits

Not only do tomatoes naturally taste great but they are healthy for you as well. This vegetable is an excellent source of both vitamins A and C, as well as a good source of potassium and vitamin K. Tomatoes, have high amounts of the strong antioxidant carotenoids, which help protect your heart and also decrease the risk of cancer.

References:
<http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org>
<https://www.whfoods.com>

Lycopene is the most abundant antioxidant in tomatoes and accounts for about 70% of the total lycopene in the US diet. In fact, scientists completed a study in which higher levels of tomato-based products in the diet were linked with a healthier heart. Another reason to enjoy this nutritious item! This nutrient-rich produce has also been linked with keeping blood pressure at normal levels. The lower sodium tomato products are naturally higher in potassium; this mineral has been found to be helpful in controlling high blood pressure. So, you should definitely increase the total amount of tomatoes in your diet!

How to Enjoy

Tomatoes can be enjoyed in a variety of ways. They are a great addition to any salad or sandwich, and can serve as a base for soups and chili. They can also be added to pizza as a marinara sauce or diced and used in a tangy salsa. This vegetable can also be a star of their own side dish. For a quick tomato salad; quarter the tomatoes and marinate them with an onion in a low-fat vinaigrette. You can add another raw vegetable for an extra crunch. Try something new! Stuff a tomato with tuna, chicken salad, etc. You can also puree tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, and onions in a food processor and season with different herbs and spices to make your own gazpacho. Here at Whitsons we always make sure that there are always a wide range of menu options that use tomatoes in a variety of ways!



Get to Know the Whitsons Registered Dietitians

Meet Katherine Ancona. Katherine is our Registered Dietitian and a nutrition expert and an advocate for healthy eating. She received her Master's Degree in Food, Nutrition, and Culinary Science from Clemson University in 2013. While attending Clemson University, she led a team of undergraduate students in modifying recipes to be healthier. She is most interested in wellness, pediatric, and culinary nutrition, and she also serves as a volunteer for the Kids Eat Right Campaign. Katherine is available to answer your questions about nutrition. Just email her at nutrition@whitsons.com.