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Tomatoes Unveiled: A Comprehensive Exploration from Cultivation to Culinary and Nutritional Significance

Dr. Saira Sattar[1], Arooj Iqbal[1], Ayesha Parveen[1], Emaan Fatima[1], Atta Samdani[1], Hamna Fatima[1], Muhammad Shahzad Iqbal[1], Muhammad Wajid[1]

1 University of Okara

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Abstract

Tomatoes are not only a culinary delight but also a nutritional powerhouse. Their diverse range of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants contributes to numerous health benefits, including heart health, cancer prevention, and eye health. Incorporating tomatoes into a balanced diet can be a flavorful and health-conscious choice. This review delves into the multifaceted uses of tomatoes across various industries, extending beyond their traditional role as a culinary delight. Tomatoes, rich in nutrients and unique compounds like lycopene, have found applications in sectors ranging from food and beverages to pharmaceuticals and textiles. In the food industry, tomatoes play a central role in processed foods, while their juices contribute to beverages and cocktails. The pharmaceutical industry utilizes tomato-derived lycopene for its antioxidant properties, and the cosmetic industry incorporates it into skincare products. Tomatoes even find application in the textile industry as a source of natural dyes, showcasing their versatility. From biotechnology and waste management to the fertilizer and animal feed industries, tomatoes emerge as a valuable resource with implications for sustainability and innovation. This abstract provides a glimpse into the expansive reach of tomatoes, emphasizing their significance beyond the dining table.

Saira Sattar[1,*], **Arooj Iqbal**[1], **Ayesha Parveen**[1], **Emaan Fatima**[1], **Atta Samdani**[1], **Hamna Fatima**[1], **Muhammad Shahzad Iqbal**[2], and **Muhammad Wajid**[3]

[1] *Department of Food Science and Technology, Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Okara, Okara, Pakistan*

[2] *Department of Biochemistry, Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Okara, Okara, Pakistan*

[3] *Department of Zoology, Faculty of Life Sciences, University of Okara, Okara, Pakistan*

[*]Correspondence: Saira Sattar (drsairasattar@uo.edu.pk)(sairasattar1607@gmail.com)

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1. Introduction

Widely regarded as the world's most consumed vegetable, the tomato, scientifically known as Solanum copernicium L., stands as a fundamental ingredient in an extensive array of raw, cooked, or processed foods. While inherently a perennial herbaceous plant, it is predominantly cultivated as an annual crop, although biennial and perennial forms exist. Thriving in both tropical and temperate climates, tomatoes grace open fields or find shelter under greenhouses in temperate regions. As a proud member of the Solanaceae family, alongside other commercially significant species, the tomato transcends geographical boundaries, being cultivated globally for local consumption and as an essential export crop (Poojitha, M, 2023).

In 2014, the global cultivation area for tomatoes spanned an impressive 5 million hectares, yielding a production of 171 million tons. Notably, major contributors to this staggering production included the People’s Republic of China and India. Originally classified by Linnaeus in 1753 as Solanum copernicium, the tomato has evolved from a taxonomical designation to a global culinary sensation (Hernández et al., 2014).

However, the tomato's significance extends beyond its palatable contributions to meals. Boasting a water content ranging from 93-95%, tomatoes emerge not only as flavorful additions but also as hydrating and nutritionally dense components. Comprising solid matter content of 5.5-9.5%, with a mere 1% attributed to seeds and skin, tomatoes exhibit a complex nutritional profile. The insoluble solids in tomato juices, constituting 15-20% of total solids, are primarily composed of lignin, cellulose, and pectin. While sucrose content is negligible, not surpassing 0.1%, glucose and fructose take the spotlight as the main reducing sugars, contributing 50 to 60% of tomato solids. The total sugar content varies between 2.19 to 3.55%. Additionally, tomatoes house a variety of polysaccharides like xylem, pectin, cellulose, and arabinoxylan, constituting about 0.7% of tomato juices (Zhang *et al.*, 2023).

In essence, the tomato transforms from a botanical entity to a nutritional powerhouse, embodying both culinary delight and healthful attributes (Yong *et al.,* 2023). This comprehensive overview unravels the multifaceted nature of the tomato, from

its global cultivation patterns to the intricate details of its nutritional composition.

2. Nutrient Profile and Antioxidant Properties

Tomatoes stand as a nutritional powerhouse, offering a wealth of essential vitamins and minerals vital for overall well-being. With notable concentrations of vitamin C, potassium, folate, and vitamin K, tomatoes contribute significantly to a balanced diet. What sets them apart is the presence of lycopene, a potent antioxidant responsible for their vibrant red hue and providing unique nutritional benefits (Table 1). Beyond their visual appeal, tomatoes boast a comprehensive nutritional profile: per 100 grams, they contain a mere 18 calories, comprising 95% water, 0.9 grams of protein, 3.9 grams of carbohydrates, 2.6 grams of sugar, 1.2 grams of fiber, and 0.2 grams of fat (Wang *et al.,* 2023). This low-calorie, high-water content combination makes tomatoes not only a flavorful addition to various dishes but also a healthy and hydrating option (Martínez *et al.,* 2024). Their nutritional richness positions tomatoes as a versatile and valuable ingredient, contributing not only to culinary delights but also to the overall health and vitality of those who incorporate them into their diet (Coelho *et al*., 2023).

At the forefront of the nutritional benefits of tomatoes is lycopene, a potent carotenoid with robust antioxidant properties. Extensive research links lycopene consumption to a reduced risk of chronic diseases, particularly cardiovascular conditions and certain cancers. Its remarkable ability to neutralize free radicals contributes significantly to overall cellular health, making tomatoes a valuable addition to a health-conscious diet.

Heart Health

Tomatoes emerge as heart-friendly allies with their high potassium content, playing a pivotal role in regulating blood pressure and reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases. The synergy of antioxidants and bioactive compounds further contributes to improved cholesterol levels, underscoring tomatoes as not just a culinary delight but a promoter of cardiovascular well-being (Løchen, M. L, 2023).

Cancer Prevention

Numerous studies hint at the potential of lycopene in tomatoes to lower the risk of specific cancers, including prostate cancer. The amalgamation of anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties works synergistically, combating oxidative stress and fortifying the body's defenses against cancerous cell formation (Martí et al., 2016).

Eye Health

A rich source of beta-carotene, lutein, and zeaxanthin, tomatoes contribute significantly to maintaining eye health and mitigating the risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Regular consumption offers a protective shield against various eye disorders, positioning tomatoes as an essential component of ocular well-being (Coelho *et al*., 2023).

Weight Management and Metabolism

With low-calorie and high-water content, tomatoes become an excellent choice for weight management. Additionally, the presence of chromium may contribute to improved insulin sensitivity and glucose metabolism, making tomatoes a valuable asset for those aiming for metabolic balance (Jeong et al., 2023).

Digestive Health

Tomatoes, rich in dietary fiber, actively support digestive health by promoting regular bowel movements and preventing constipation. The fiber content induces a feeling of fullness, aiding in weight control and enhancing overall digestive well-being (Wu et al., 2023).

3. Diverse Industrial Utilization of Tomatoes

Tomatoes extend their influence far beyond the culinary realm, finding a multitude of applications in various industries. In the cosmetics sector, compounds like lycopene, vitamin C, and potassium, sourced from tomatoes, contribute to anti-aging and skin-protective properties, making them valuable ingredients in skincare products (Eslami et al., 2023).

In the realm of sustainable energy, tomato waste, including peels, cores, and leaves, serves as a rich organic feedstock for biogas production, exemplifying the resourcefulness in utilizing every part of the fruit.

Food Processing

Tomatoes play a pivotal role in the food processing industry, serving as natural flavor enhancers in products like ketchup, sauces, and soups. Their red pigmentation also positions them as sought-after natural coloring agents (Silva *et al.*, 2023; Khan *et al.,* 2023).

Agricultural Research

In the domain of agricultural research, tomatoes act as key subjects for studying plant biology, delving into genetics, physiology, and biochemistry. This research has fostered the development of new tomato varieties boasting enhanced yield, disease resistance, and nutritional value (Schreinemachers et al., 2017).

Biotechnology Industry

Tomatoes, prized for their genetic stability and ease of cultivation, are under scrutiny for potential applications in biotechnology, including gene therapy and bioengineering, showcasing their adaptability in cutting-edge research (Meng et al., 2022).

Beverage Industry

Within the beverage industry, tomatoes contribute to both healthful and indulgent options. Tomato juice stands out as a standalone beverage or a base for vegetable juices, while the iconic Bloody Mary cocktail features tomato juice as a key ingredient (Kumar *et al.*, 2023).

Pharmaceutical Industry

Lycopene, a potent compound inherent in tomatoes, takes center stage in the pharmaceutical sector. Extracted for its antioxidant properties, lycopene finds application in certain pharmaceutical formulations. Additionally, tomatoes may undergo processing into supplements, harnessing their potential health benefits (López-Yerena et al., 2023).

In essence, the industrial applications of tomatoes illustrate their remarkable versatility, from enhancing the flavor profile of foods to contributing to advancements in biotechnology, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals. The tomato, once solely a culinary delight, emerges as a multifaceted resource with implications for sustainability, innovation, and diverse scientific fields.

4. Tomato Based Products

The world of tomato-based products unfolds as a captivating journey from fresh harvests to an array of enticing culinary creations. Various meticulous processing methods are employed to transform vibrant tomatoes into a diverse range of forms and products (López-Yerena *et al.*, 2023). Tomato sauce begins with blanching and pureeing, simmering to perfection, and infusing flavors with herbs and spices. The iconic ketchup emerges from washed, peeled, and chopped tomatoes, undergoing a flavorful alchemy with sugar, vinegar, and spices. Salsa, a lively dance of tomatoes, onions, peppers, and spices, marinates to perfection, delivering a burst of flavors. Tomato paste is crafted through washing, crushing, and reducing moisture to create a concentrated culinary essence. Canned tomatoes, in diverse shapes, endure heat processing for preservation, offering a pantry staple. Sun-dried tomatoes, halved or sliced, bask in the sun or dehydrators, packed in oil or vacuum-sealed for an intense burst of flavor. Tomato juice, filtered for purity, captures the essence of freshly crushed tomatoes, while tomato-based soup combines the richness of tomato sauce with additional savory elements. Tomato jam or chutney, a symphony of tomatoes, sugar, vinegar, and spices, simmers to a luscious consistency. Lastly, tomato powder, created through dehydration, encapsulates the essence of tomatoes in a fine, preserved form. These culinary marvels, though nuanced in their processes, collectively celebrate the artistry of transforming tomatoes into a spectrum of delightful and versatile products (Pereira et al., 2023).

5. Processing Tomato Seed Oil

Tomato seed oil, also known as lycopene oil, is a type of vegetable oil extracted from the seeds of tomatoes. It is rich in lycopene, a powerful antioxidant that gives tomatoes their red color. Lycopene has been shown to have various health

benefits, such as reducing the risk of cancer and heart disease (Kumar *et al.,* 2022). Tomato seed oil is also high in polyunsaturated fatty acids, particularly linoleic acid, which may help lower cholesterol levels. It has a mild, slightly sweet flavor and can be used as cooking oil or in cosmetic products due to its moisturizing and anti-inflammatory properties. However, it should be noted that the yield of tomato seed oil is relatively low compared to other vegetable oils, making it more expensive.

The processing of tomato seed oil requires specialized equipment and expertise, making it more expensive than other vegetable oils with higher yields (Sangeetha et al., 2023). However, the demand for natural and healthy ingredients in various industries is driving research and development efforts to improve the efficiency and yield of the extraction process. Tomato seed oil, also known as lycopene oil, involves several steps to release the oil from the seeds and separate it from the solids (Méndez-Carmona et al., 2023). Here is a detailed description of the extraction process:

i. **Tomato seed collection:** The first step is to collect the seeds from ripe tomatoes. This can be done by hand or through mechanical methods such as centrifugation or flotation. The seeds are then dried and stored until further processing.
ii. **Crushing**: The dried seeds are crushed to break open the seed coat and release the oil. This can be done using a hammer mill, a roller mill, or a screw press.
iii. **Screw pressing:** The crushed seeds are then fed into a screw press, which applies pressure to extract the oil. The oil is separated from the solids and collected in a tank.
iv. **Centrifuging**: Another method of extracting oil from tomato seeds is centrifugation. The crushed seeds are mixed with a solvent, such as hexane, and then centrifuged to separate the oil from the solids and impurities.
v. **Filtering:** The crude oil obtained from either screw pressing or centrifugation is then filtered to remove any remaining solids and impurities.
vi. **Decolorization:** The filtered oil may still have a yellowish color due to carotenoids, which can affect its quality and stability. To remove these impurities, the oil is treated with activated carbon or clay to decolorize it.
vii. **Deacidification:** Tomato seed oil contains free fatty acids, which can lead to spoilage and rancidity over time. To remove these acids, the oil is treated with an alkaline solution, such as sodium hydroxide, to neutralize them.
viii. **Deodorization:** The deacidified oil may still have an unpleasant odor due to volatile compounds such as hexanal and octanal. To remove these compounds, the oil is heated under vacuum at high temperatures to deodorize it.
ix. **Packaging and storage:** The purified oil is then packaged in airtight containers and stored in a cool, dry place to prevent oxidation and spoilage. The containers should be opaque to protect the oil from light, which can degrade the quality of the oil over time.

6. Conclusion

Tomatoes are not only a delicious and versatile ingredient in cooking but also offer a range of nutritional and health benefits. Their high content of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants makes them a healthy addition to any diet, while their low-calorie count makes them a great choice for weight management. Additionally, the industrial applications of tomatoes

in food processing, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals demonstrate their versatility and value beyond just their culinary uses. Overall, tomatoes are a nutritious and beneficial food that should be included in a healthy diet.

Tomato
Nutrition Facts

Serving size 100 g		DV
Calories	**18 kcal**	**1%**
Total Carbohydrate	**3.9 g**	**1%**
Dietary Fiber	1.2 g	5%
Sugars	2.6 g	
Total Fat	**0.2 g**	**0%**
Protein	**0.9 g**	**1%**
Vitamin A	833 IU	17%
Vitamin C	12.7 mg	21%
Vitamin E	0.5 mg	3%
Vitamin K	7.9 µg	10%
Niacin	0.6 mg	3%
Vitamin B6	0.1 mg	4%
Folate	15 µg	4%
Magnesium	11 mg	3%
Phosphorus	24 mg	2%
Potassium	237 mg	7%
Copper	0.1 mg	3%
Manganese	0.1 mg	6%

% Daily values (DV) are based on a 2000 calories Diet.
DV may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Table 1. Nutrient Profile of Tomato

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