

## Watermelon: Refreshing & Nutritious!

*A cool favorite at summer picnics and barbeques, watermelon offers a lot more than refreshment on a hot day!*

We know that a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can reduce the risk of chronic diseases like certain cancers and heart disease. Besides their traditional vitamins and minerals, scientists are busy researching numerous *phytonutrients* – plant nutrients – found in fruits and vegetables that play powerful roles in the body and in preventing disease. One such nutrient that has gained considerable recent attention is lycopene – a deep red pigment and phytonutrient – and its role as a powerful antioxidant that may reduce the risk of prostate and other cancers and heart attacks.

Most previous research has focused on tomatoes – one rich source of lycopene. But this is changing. According to Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists, part of the USDA, watermelon is another rich source of lycopene – with about 40% more lycopene than raw tomatoes.

A study conducted by ARS researchers found that the lycopene in fresh watermelons was easily absorbed and used in the body. This came with some surprise since the lycopene in tomatoes requires heat-processing to be well-absorbed and available in the body. Thus, tomato juice and tomato sauces are better sources of lycopene than raw tomatoes. Fresh watermelon offers equal bioavailability without processing.

Besides being rich in lycopene, watermelon is a good source of vitamins A, B<sub>1</sub> (thiamin), B<sub>6</sub> and C, and is naturally fat-free. The deeper red and sweeter the watermelon, the more nutritious it is.

Look for watermelon juices and other products to hit the market soon. In the meantime, enjoy the all-American favorite – fresh, ripe, nutrient-packed watermelon.

### *References:*

Agricultural Research Service, USDA. Internet Site: [www.ars.usda.gov](http://www.ars.usda.gov). (June 2002).

Arnold, J. (2002). Watermelon Packs a Powerful Lycopene Punch. *Agricultural Research*, 6/02.