

Tomatoes and Skin Protection



Can tomatoes protect your skin?

There is a magical component in tomatoes that research is beginning to show could protect our skin from UV damage from sunburn. It's called lycopene and it is a very effective antioxidant.

About 85% of lycopene in the western diet is obtained only from tomatoes and the best place to find it is in tomato paste.

Our test was to establish whether eating tomato paste could help protect the skin from UV damage and UV-induced reddening. We took 23 women who were used to burning merely at the sight of the sun and asked half of them to eat 55g of tomato paste every day for 12 weeks (giving them 16mg of lycopene).

"an unbelievable 30% increase in skin protection"

As a defence against UV rays, the body tans when exposed to moderate levels of radiation. This helps to block UV penetration and prevent damage to the vulnerable skin tissues deeper down. In order to test the efficacy of tomatoes on our guinea pigs we tested the lowest dose of UV needed to provoke a visible response on their skin. Then we exposed them to a range of UV radiation and compared the damage done to those who ate tomatoes and those who didn't.

After 12 weeks of rigorously following the tomato paste diet we brought our women back to the lab and burnt them all over again. Was it all in vain? When tested again our volunteers on the lycopene diet had a 30% increase in skin protection.

This doesn't mean that you should stop using sun block but it's good to know that simply by increasing tomatoes in your diet you can help protect your skin from the daily sun damage which happens without us even realising.

Watch the films in our interactive player and take a look at some Takeaway Tips on how to stay young and beautiful.