

FDA Says Lycopene Not Cancer-Protective



Diet-cancer experts at the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) weighed in on a review article authored by a team of scientists at the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), published in the July 10th issue of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute (JNCI).

Washington, D.C. - infoZine - In 2005, the FDA rejected a supplement manufacturer's petition to be able to tout lycopene as a cancer-preventer. In the JNCI article, the FDA team published the review of the literature they conducted two years ago that led to their decision to deny the marketer's request.

The review's conclusion: there's not enough evidence to make any claims about tomatoes in general, and lycopene in particular.

This position echoes AICR's long-standing conviction that overall diet, not "superfoods" or supplements, is the key to lowering cancer risk.

"It's long been clear that loading up on any one food, or food supplement, is not supported by the research," said AICR Nutrition Advisor Karen Collins, RD. "The strongest evidence shows that diets high in a variety of different vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans are associated with lower risk of developing cancer."

Health Claims Distract from the "Big Picture"

As an independent cancer research organization, AICR does not believe health advice and food marketing should mix. "When advertisers use health claims, qualified or not, they focus the public's attention on specific products and not the overall shape of the diet," said Collins. "That's a disservice to the consumer, because it's the big picture that matters."

Collins pointed out that research on the cancer-fighting potential of various foods and food components has been going on for years. Whether or not the government believes this evidence rises to the level needed for a health claim, this ongoing research has shown positive results with respect to tomatoes and cancer.

In the laboratory, tomato components have stopped the proliferation of several cancer cells types, including breast, lung, and endometrium. Tomatoes have

attracted particular attention from prostate cancer researchers because lycopene and its related compounds tend to concentrate in tissues of the prostate. In animal models, consumption of tomato compounds has been linked to large decreases in prostate cancer risk.

In fact, studies that compare the diets and disease rates of different populations have repeatedly associated diets high in tomatoes with lower prostate cancer risk, as well as lower risk of stomach and pancreatic cancers.

One notable study that tracked the diets of more than 47,000 men for six years found that those who ate the most tomato products (cooked tomatoes, tomato sauce, pizza and tomato juice) had a 35% lower risk of early prostate cancer and a 53% lower risk of advanced prostate cancer than men who ate the least of these foods.

No Magic Bullets

Collins reiterated AICR's caution that no single food or food substance should be seen as a magic bullet of protection. All vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans contain natural phytochemicals, and many of these compounds have shown the potential to protect against cancer development in a variety of ways.

Because many of these substances seem to work in combination, the key is to eat a diet that's high in a variety of the foods that contain them. Loading up on any one food, or a supplement that contains high doses of isolated food components, is not recommended.

Expert Report Will Help Dispel Confusion

On November 1st of this year, AICR and its international affiliate organizations will publish the most comprehensive assessment of the scientific literature on diet, physical activity and cancer risk ever undertaken.

That report, *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity and the Prevention of Cancer: A Global Perspective*, will synthesize data from thousands of studies and provide guidelines for the public, and for the scientific/medical community. It will provide answers to questions about nutrition and cancer - including the role of lycopene - that are based on a thorough review of the available science.

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