In the news

FDA SQUASHES TOMATO ANTICANCER CLAIMS

There is only limited evidence for an association between eating tomatoes and a decreased risk of certain cancers, according to a recent review by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reported in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

The FDA conducted the review in response to applications from two producers of tomato-based products who were planning to advertise the anticancer benefits of tomatoes on their product labels. However, contrary to earlier research that suggested consuming one or more weekly servings of tomato sauce was enough to reduce prostate cancer risk by as much as 60%, the FDA's review of over a dozen studies concluded that 'there is little scientific evidence' to support an association between tomato consumption and reduced cancer risk (<http://www.sciencedaily.com>, 13 July 2007).

It had previously been thought that lycopene, an antioxidant abundant in tomatoes and responsible for their red coloration, was the cause of the cancer-protective effects observed in earlier studies. But the FDA's response to these claims was even more unequivocal, stating that there was 'no credible evidence' that lycopene could be linked with a cancer-protective effect, either in tomatoes or as a dietary supplement (<http://www.time.com>, 11 July 2007).

So it seems the chances of tomatoes being able to stave off cancer are slim, but they are still important as part of a balanced diet rich in fruit in vegetables. As Marji McCullough, director of nutritional epidemiology at the American Cancer Society points out, "In our guidelines, we encourage people to eat a variety of foods ... several studies have suggested a lower risk of cancer with some kinds of foods, including tomatoes, but we encourage variety" (<http://www.forbes.com>, 10 July 2007).

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