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'Cancer-fighting tomato' on sale

The tomato contains higher levels of lycopene than other vine varieties
A so-called super tomato bred to have unusually high levels of a substance which may cut the risk of certain cancers has been launched by Tesco.

The supermarket giant says its Healthy Living Tomato on the Vine contains up to twice the level of lycopene found in other vine tomatoes.

Lycopene is an antioxidant that is thought to halt cell damage in the body and it gives tomatoes their red colour.

Cancer charities said eating any type of tomato was worthwhile.

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Prostate Cancer Charity

Tomatoes are already known for their health benefits and have been linked with reducing the risk of prostate, colorectal and breast cancers.

A study of thousands of men found that eating 10 or more servings of tomato sauce or tomatoes a week reduced prostate cancer risk by 45%.

Other research has found that lycopene may be able to reduce the amount of so-called "bad" cholesterol and perhaps the risk of heart disease.

Tesco produce technical manager Ian Reed said the super tomato was the first of a range of "functional foods" being developed by the supermarket.

He said: "The health benefits of anti-oxidants such as lycopene in our diets have recently attracted a lot of positive attention from both the medical and culinary worlds.

"Functional foods such as tomatoes naturally have high levels of lycopene however this naturally-bred variety has even higher levels than standard ones and tastes great as well."

Varied diet

Dr Chris Hiley, head of policy and research at the Prostate Cancer Charity, said it was excellent that Tesco has recognised the importance of the disease.

"Over recent years, prostate cancer researchers have repeatedly returned to questions about the role of the antioxidant, lycopene, in diet - particularly from tomato-based products - in light of its apparent association with a reduced risk of

prostate cancer.

"Not all studies are positive, but many are. We still can't come to a firm conclusion that the risk of prostate cancer is reduced by increasing lycopene intake, but it is very clear that men should eat a varied and healthy diet, and tomato and tomato-based products have a place in that.

Men should also eat a diet containing plenty of fruit and vegetables, reduce their intake of animal fat, particularly red meat, and keep their weight under control, she added.

Henry Scowcroft, Cancer Research UK's science information officer, said there was no clear evidence that eating more tomatoes or even the new "super-tomatoes" can decrease your prostate cancer risk.

He added: "Tomatoes are also rich in many other important nutrients such as vitamins A C and E. So eating more of any type of tomato is worthwhile.

"There is plenty of evidence that a diet containing five portions of fruit and vegetables a day can lower your chances of cancer, heart disease and other conditions."

The new tomatoes will be sold in a pack of four or five costing £1.89.

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Tomato pill 'beats heart disease'

Tomatoes

Tomatoes are a rich source of lycopene

Scientists say a natural supplement made from tomatoes, taken daily, can stave off heart disease and strokes.

The tomato pill contains an active ingredient from the Mediterranean diet - lycopene - that blocks "bad" LDL cholesterol that can clog the arteries.

Ateronon, made by a biotechnology spin-out company of Cambridge University, is being launched as a dietary supplement and will be sold on the high street.

Experts said more trials were needed to see how effective the treatment is.

More than a dozen preliminary trials involving around 150 people with heart disease indicate that Ateronon can reduce the oxidation of harmful fats in the blood to almost zero within as little as eight weeks, a meeting of the British Cardiovascular Society will be told at Ateronon's launch on Monday.

Our advice to heart disease patients or those at high risk is to rely on proven medications prescribed by their doctor, and aim to get the benefits of a Mediterranean diet by eating plenty of fresh fruit and veg
Professor Peter Weissberg of the British Heart Foundation

Neuroscientist Peter Kirkpatrick, who will lead a further research project at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge on behalf of Cambridge Theranostics Ltd, said the supplement could be much more effective than statin drugs that are currently used by doctors to treat high cholesterol.

But Professor Peter Weissberg of the British Heart Foundation said: "As always, we caution people to wait for any new drug or modified 'natural' product to be clinically proven to offer benefits before taking it.

"It will take some time, and several clinical trials, to provide such evidence for Ateronon.

"In the meantime, our advice to heart disease patients or those at high risk is to rely on proven medications prescribed by their doctor, and aim to get the benefits of a Mediterranean diet by eating plenty of fresh fruit and veg."

He said the British Heart Foundation had supported some of the basic science at Cambridge University underpinning the development of the product.

Professor Anthony Leeds, trustee of the cholesterol charity Heart UK, said: "The new lycopene product Ateronon represents an entirely new approach to the treatment of high blood cholesterol and opens up the exciting possibility."

He said the preliminary findings were "very promising".

Lycopene is an antioxidant contained in the skin of tomatoes which gives them their red colour. But lycopene ingested in its natural form is poorly absorbed.

Ateronon contains a refined, more readily absorbed version of lycopene that was originally developed by Nestle.

Dr Peter Coleman of The Stroke Association said: "We know that diets rich in antioxidants are beneficial in reducing the plaque build up and welcome the findings of this research."