



**Keeping a fresh perspective on your eyes**  
page 14B

**Study links Facebook to depression**  
page 14B



# livingwell

## TOMATOES ON THE ATTACK — AGAINST CANCER

By PATTY LEON  
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**I**n 1978, the low-budget science-fiction film "Attack of the Killer Tomatoes" was a hit among young moviegoers. The film was a spoof on the horror and sci-fi genre movies of that time and featured monstrous tomatoes.

volting against humans, killing them off one by one.

Today, however, tomatoes are highly regarded in helping humans in battling a barrage of diseases. Prostate and breast cancer, surprisingly, top the list.

Research indicates that tomatoes contain lycopene, which scientists consider to be a strong antioxidant.

"Several studies have shown that a diet high in fruits, vegetables, soy, fiber, lycopene — which you find in tomatoes — and the omega-3 fatty acids reduces the risk of both breast cancer and prostate cancer," Dr. Dean Ornish, a clinical professor of medicine at the University of California San Francisco, reported when speaking about the benefits of a more plant-based diet while in Savannah in November. "These diets contain a lot of naturally occurring antioxidants that, combined with physical activity, have been shown to reduce what is called oxidative stress." Ornish has spent decades researching the benefits of lifestyle changes, including a plant-based diet rich in foods that contain lycopene and other antioxidants, in reducing or completely eliminating chronic illnesses.

Dr. Edward Giovannucci, a professor of nutrition and epidemiology at Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health, said the lycopene found in tomatoes and other fruits and vegetables is a carotenoid, a family of pigments that give fruits and vegetables their bright red, orange and yellow coloring.

In 2002, Giovannucci published his research findings in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute confirming that frequent tomato or lycopene intake was associated with a reduced risk of prostate cancer. His research also found that lycopene intake was associated with a reduced risk of prostate cancer and

that intake of tomato sauce, the primary source of bioavailable lycopene, was associated with an even greater reduction in prostate cancer risk.

More recently, a team of Finnish researchers published a report in the journal Neurology stating that lycopene decreases the risk of stroke in men. The report was published in October 2012 and was based on research following more than 1,000 men over a period of 12 years.

Dr. Andrew Weil is an American physician, teacher and author on holistic health and the founder and director of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona. He spoke at the November lecture in Savannah. Weil reported that research shows lycopene may help prevent heart disease, atherosclerosis and breast and prostate cancers. He said it also may be the most powerful carotenoid against singlet oxygen, a highly reactive oxygen molecule and a primary cause of premature skin aging.

Samantha Heller, a registered dietitian and frequent contributor to "The Dr. Oz Show," said lycopene also is found in pink grapefruit, watermelon and guava. She agrees that it helps with premature skin aging and helps reduce the risk of sunburn.

"It helps protect the skin against the ultraviolet rays that cause sunburn and premature aging," she reported on doctoroz.com, adding that folks should still apply sunscreen.

Weil noted that despite being red, strawberries and cherries do not contain lycopene. It is found in watermelons and other fruits and vegetables, he said, just not in the amount found in tomatoes.

Like Giovannucci, Weil said the cooking process makes the lycopene more bio-available and accounts for 85 percent of how Americans take in lycopene in their diets.

Giovannucci recommends at least 10 milligrams of lycopene per day and said that because lycopene is a fat-soluble nutrient, it is best taken when combined with some form of healthy fat.

For example, he reported that when cooking a tomato sauce, adding a little oil adds flavor and the fat needed for the lycopene to be absorbed in the body. He added that getting the recommended amount is not that difficult. A one-cup can of pure tomato juice contains 21,960 micrograms — nearly 22 milligrams — of lycopene.



# Keeping a fresh perspective on your eyes

See the facts about vision during Women's Eye Health and Safety Month

By MARK KISHEL, M.D.  
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In many households, women tend to actively be on the lookout for their family's overall health and well-being. While selflessly putting the needs of loved ones before their own, women can often overlook health problems of their own that could lead to major health-care costs down the road. This is especially true when it comes to vision.

Vision problems are the second most prevalent health problem in the country, affecting more than 120 million people, according to the Vision Council of America. Al-

though it's important for everyone to maintain healthy eyes, research shows that women are at greater risk of suffering permanent vision loss than men. In fact, 66 percent of women are more likely to incur blindness than men, according to Prevent Blindness, a leading eye-health organization.

Additionally, women are significantly more likely to develop various vision issues, including glaucoma, cataracts, refractive error and age-related macular degeneration, or AMD, which is the leading cause of vision loss among Americans older than age 55. Furthermore, women are also at greater risk of other health con-

ditions that could impact their vision, such as diabetes, multiple sclerosis, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis and breast cancer.

Because 91 percent of women are unaware of these heightened risks, many do not take the proper precautions to ensure they have a good bill of health. April is National Women's Eye Health and Safety Month, and it's the perfect time for all women (and men) to take a fresh look at taking care of their eyes.

Here are a few ways you can help protect -- and improve -- your vision:

- Know your family's

history: Because some eye diseases and conditions are hereditary, research and be aware of your family's eye-health history so you can inform your doctor.

- Quit smoking (or never start): Studies show that smoking increases the risk of AMD, cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and dry-eye syndrome. Smokers are three to four times more likely to develop AMD than nonsmokers, and people living with smokers nearly double their risk of developing the disease as well.

- Wear protective eye equipment: Use proper eyewear when participating in sports or doing various chores, such

as yardwork and repairs around the house. Also, wear brimmed hats and sunglasses that substantially block ultraviolet A, or UVA, and ultraviolet B, or UVB, rays.

- Maintain a healthy diet: Vitamins C and E, zinc, lutein, zeaxanthin and omega-3 fatty acids all play an important role in eye health. Ideal foods to incorporate in your diet include carrots, spinach, kale, grapefruit, strawberries, seeds, nuts, eggs, salmon, albacore tuna, trout and halibut. In addition, you can also take nutritional supplements.

- Visit your eye-care specialist regularly: Some eye diseases have no symptoms. To ensure you have

healthy vision and catch potential problems early, it is important to get a comprehensive dilated eye exam every two years for adults ages 18 to 60, and annual exams for seniors age 61 and older. These exams are also helpful for detecting other high-risk health conditions, such as diabetes, high-blood pressure and high cholesterol.

By proactively acting on these tips and making vision a health priority now, you will save your eyes and overall health in the long run.

Kishel is senior clinical officer for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Georgia and a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

## Study links Facebook to depression

SPECIAL TO THE COURIER  
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The social-media site Facebook can be an effective tool for connecting with new and old friends. However, some users spending quite a bit of time viewing Facebook may inevitably begin comparing what's happening in their lives to the activities and accomplishments of their friends.

According to University of Houston researcher Mai-Ly Steers, this kind of social comparison paired with the amount of time spent on Facebook may be linked to depressive symptoms. Steers' research on the topic is presented in the article "Seeing Everyone Else's Highlight

Reels: How Facebook Usage is Linked to Depressive Symptoms," published in the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology.

"Although social comparison processes have been examined at length in traditional contexts, the literature is only beginning to explore social comparisons in online social-networking settings," said Steers, a doctoral candidate in social psychology at the university.

Steers conducted two studies to investigate how social comparison to peers on Facebook might impact users' psychological health. Both studies provide evidence that Facebook users felt depressed when comparing themselves to others.

"It doesn't mean Facebook causes depression, but that depressed feelings and lots of time on Facebook and comparing oneself to others tend to go hand in hand," Steers said.

The first study found an association between time spent on Facebook and depressive symptoms for both genders. However, the results demonstrated that making Facebook social comparisons mediated the link between time spent on Facebook and depressive symptoms for men only. Similarly, the second study found a relationship between the amount of time spent on Facebook and depressive symptoms was mediated by social comparisons on Facebook.

Unlike the first study, gender did not moderate these associations.

The concept of social comparison is not new. In fact, it has been studied in face-to-face contexts since the 1950s. However, engaging in social comparisons on online social-media sites may make people feel even worse.

"One danger is that Facebook often gives us information about our friends that we are not normally privy to, which gives us even more opportunities to socially compare," Steers said. "You can't really control the impulse to compare because you never know what your friends are going to post. In addition, most of our Facebook

friends tend to post about the good things that occur in their lives while leaving out the bad. If we're comparing ourselves to our friends' 'highlight reels,' this may lead us to think their lives are better than they actually are and, conversely, make us feel worse about our own lives."

Steers said people afflicted with emotional difficulties may be particularly susceptible to depressive symptoms from Facebook social comparison after spending more time on the site. For already distressed individuals, this distorted view of their friends' lives may make them feel alone in their internal struggles, which may compound their feelings of loneliness and isolation.

"This research and previous research indicates the act of socially comparing oneself to others is related to long-term destructive emotions. Any benefit gained from making social comparisons is temporary, and engaging in frequent social comparison of any kind may be linked to lower well-being," Steers said.

Steers hopes the results of these studies will help people understand that technological advances often possess both intended and unintended consequences. Further, she hopes her research will help guide future interventions that target the reduction of Facebook use among those at risk for depression.



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