



# Juice up your health

by Lynette Louw

While some of the earliest beverages known to man were beer, whisky, champagne and wine, their alcoholic content did not lend these products to major successes in terms of general consumption – for obvious reasons. Fruit juice only entered the scene much later, making the lives of the more health conscious a little bit more bearable.

Tomato juice is one of the lesser consumed fruit juices (yes, scientifically tomatoes are the fruit of the tomato plant. To be more specific, it is classified as a berry). In all of its forms (tomato sauce, juice and raw), the tomato is the second-most widely consumed vegetable in the USA (where it was declared a vegetable in the 1930s), after the potato.

## Finding its place

Tomato juice as a beverage gained popularity in the mid-20th century. While the propable origin of tomato juice may differ, the one most accepted is that American-born French chef, Louis Perrin, served tomato juice to his guests at a resort in the American state of Indiana in 1917.

In those early days, the product did not yield what is today regarded as the right colour and flavour. When the first products were canned in the 1920s, the tomato solids had often settled at the bottom of the cans and did not pour out with the rest of the juice, hence a watery, thin and dirty red colour. This problem was solved in 1928, when a so-called viscoliser, previously used in the manufacture of ice-cream, was used.

Tomato juice was an instant hit in the USA and large food processing companies moved in to get their piece of the action. Besides certain companies marketing it as a juice, others use it as the basis of their canned soups. It also serves as a packing fluid for canned tomatoes.

And it didn't take too long before tomato juice was used as a mixer by a barman in Paris, who added vodka and Worcestershire sauce to produce the infamous Bloody Mary. Other alcoholic beverages known to use tomato juice as a mixer, include a mixture of beer and tomato juice, which is popular in Mexico and Canada.

### Healthy aspects

With health becoming a bigger concern among consumers, tomato juice was bound to eventually take its rightful place among the juices of the world. Although not many people drink it on its own, it has become a very popular ingredient in veggie juices. Interestingly, the well-known V8 vegetable juice was produced as far back as 1933 and consisted of a blend of eight vegetables, of which tomato juice was a major ingredient.

Tomato juice, as we know it today, may not be as healthy and fresh as its pioneer products, but its health benefits are nevertheless hailed by the health conscious. Nowadays, it can be purchased in cans, 250 ml boxes and 1 l boxes. Most well-known fruit juice processors also produce tomato juice. Commercial manufacturers often add salt to the product, while other ingredients may include products such as onion or garlic powder and other spices.

A serving of canned tomato juice (with salt added) contains carbohydrates, some dietary fibre, almost no fat, some protein and a healthy dose of vitamin C. Tomatoes are low in calories, but proportionately high in sugar.

### More healthy stuff

Small-scale studies have indicated the presence of a factor dubbed P3, which inhibits the platelets in blood from clumping and forming blood clots – a factor which can be very beneficial to diabetes sufferers.

Australian research published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, showed that after just three weeks of consuming tomato juice, the platelet aggregation (the clumping together of blood cells) was significantly reduced among those participants drinking real tomato juice, while no such effect was noted in those receiving a placebo.

The antioxidant, lycopene, is also found in tomato juice, which protects against prostate cancer, breast cancer, atherosclerosis, and coronary artery disease.

Tomatoes also contain carotenoids, which may provide protection from free radicals.

Tomato juice is also a good source of copper, iron, magnesium, manganese, niacin, pantothenic acid, thiamin and vitamin K; and contains folate, potassium, and vitamins A, B<sub>6</sub> and, as stated previously, good levels of vitamin C.

### Popularity warning?

According to a report by market research company, Mintel, the British market seems to have moved away from tomato juice consumption slightly: "There was a time when tomato juice or grapefruit juice were firm favourites at every self-respecting British guesthouse. But now these juices are losing out to more exotic flavours," the report states.

While the more exotic types might be outshining our trusted old favourites for the moment, it doesn't seem as though tomato juice will ever lose its cool. Its health benefits far outweigh anything else and with health trends gaining momentum every day, tomato juice surely is here to stay.

*(Sources available from the author.) M&J*