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Put A Little Love In Your Heart

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EU states are witnessing a spiralling epidemic in cardiovascular disease and rocketing diabetes and chronic obesity with proportional burden of cost and increasing demands on health systems. Cardiovascular disease alone accounts for half of all deaths per year in Europe and is estimated to cost the EU 170 Billion€ per year. Lowering the risk of disease has therefore become imperative.

“We are trying to persuade populations to adopt heart- healthy eating habits by sending themselves a nutritional Valentine’s card” says Dr. Cristina Mele of NUTRIUNIT (project partner, Rome). “Literally putting a little love in your heart by making small dietary changes can make massive and instant improvements to your health and quality of life.”

LYCOCARD (**lycopene-cardiovascular**) may be part of the solution; a 5-year integrated project that started in April 2006 to identify exactly why lycopene, sourced mostly from processed tomato products, may play an important role in protecting citizens by preventing cardiovascular disease.

Project partners, Deutsche Herzstiftung (German Heart Foundation) and NUTRIUNIT (Rome University) will transmit the results with obvious benefits for consumers, health care and the tomato industry. Studies now show consumers making informed dietary choices based on solid scientific conclusions and as the project progresses, LYCOCARD will develop new health-food products based on its research.

“Findings will lead to novel dietary guidelines helping consumers select specific diets to prevent and minimise disease risk ” explains LYCOCARD project co-ordinator Dr. Volker Böhm of the University of Jena. “LYCOCARD will therefore improve the health of consumers in Europe (and worldwide). This helps reduce the growing cost of health care. In addition, the food industry will be strengthened by increasing demand for health-related tomato products.”

“Effectively transmitting these dietary guidelines to the health care community and general public is the greatest challenge. Dissemination activities revolve around the strong image of the project logo and the innovative way the project has branded itself to represent heart-healthy nutrition through personal self-caring” says Dr. Böhm.

“The logo in reverse now brands our new, online magazine “Tomato+Health”, published to provide a broad range of nutritional information resources for different interest groups, which includes puzzles and games for children, classroom teaching materials, a strong press kit and dietary information for health professionals and researchers. The e-magazine launches at the International Tomato Day in Parma, Italy on the 17th October 2007.”

The project has already been prominently mentioned in a new reference book about the many health effects attributed to tomato and tomato products. As the edition "*Tomatoes, Lycopene & Human Health, preventing chronic diseases*" was closing, the editorial team chose to include a chapter that discusses LYCOCARD as it relates to preventing cardiovascular disease. The book, now on release from Caledonian Science Press is certainly not the last you will hear about this groundbreaking research.

While public administrations consider the wisdom of investing in preventative measures against the looming threat of overwhelmed health systems, they might stop and consider taking a closer look at this small part of the solution.

Please visit www.lycocard.com or try www.tomatoandhealth.com