



## **Keeping it Cold**

Elizabeth C. Shephard

When it comes to Watermelon at a picnic, many people put their watermelon on ice. Up until now, this practice it was fine, just a matter of taste preference. The real story is out, watermelon is less nutritious cold. The study reported in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry states that watermelons stored at room temperature deliver more nutrients than refrigerated or freshly picked melons. The study looked specifically at carotenoid compounds, naturally occurring antioxidants that can counter the damage caused by sun, chemicals and day-to-day living. Watermelons are high in lycopene, which is an antioxidant that makes gives watermelons and tomatoes their red color and may help prevent heart disease and some cancers.

After testing several varieties of watermelon, the study showed that whole watermelons stored at 70 degrees Fahrenheit, which is about room temperature in air-conditioned buildings, had substantially more nutrients. Compared to freshly picked fruit, watermelons stored at 70 degrees F gained up to 40 percent more lycopene and 50 percent to 139 percent extra beta-carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A. Findings showed that watermelons continue to produce nutrients after they are picked and that chilling slows this process. They also found that at refrigerated temperatures, like 41 degrees F, watermelon starts to decay and develop lesions after about a week.

So next time think about the benefits and choose a room temperature watermelon.

The recommendation for watermelons after they are cut would be to store at 41 degrees F, or lower. When watermelons are cut there is a greater risk of contamination, and microorganisms that may cause your melon to become a safety risk, rapidly multiply at room temperature causing you to be at risk.

### Carotenoid Changes of Intact Watermelons after Storage

Perkins-Veazie, P.; Collins, J. K.

J. Agric. Food Chem.; (Article); 2006; ASAP Article; DOI: 10.1021/jf0532664g