

Chili

Chili's, Chili Peppers, Peppers, Capsicums and Cayenne's are all a part of the same genus of plants known collectively as Capsicum. Together with several New World crops like tomato, tobacco and potato they belong to the so called 'deadly' Nightshade family along with the well known poisonous herbs Mandrake and Belladonna. Most of these plants have been introduced to Europe only in the last five centuries and were initially considered poisonous or evil due to their similarities to the more dangerous members of the nightshade family. Despite the common name however, they are in no way related to the old world 'Black Pepper' which originated in India and was present in Europe for significantly longer. Chili peppers have been a part of the human diet in the Americas however, since at least 7500 BC and perhaps earlier.

More than just a taste sensation and something to bring a glow to your cheeks, Chili has been a valued medicine since the time of its discovery. Modern herbalists have been equally impressed by its virtues with Dr Shulze stating "If you master only one herb in your life, master cayenne pepper. It is more powerful than any other." Mrs Grieve's modern Herbal more modestly says 'For persons addicted to drink it seems to be useful by reducing the dilated blood vessels and thus relieving chronic congestion'. Some sources say it also reduces the craving for alcohol. Modern Herbalism is also recommending Cayenne pepper as a preventative against hardening of the arteries, stroke, and heart disease and the common cold.

Canadian researchers have recently confirmed the profound medical uses of Chili when they used capsaicin from chilies to kill nerve cells in the pancreases of mice with Type 1 diabetes, thus allowing the insulin producing cells to start producing insulin again, and Australian researchers at the University of Tasmania found that the amount of insulin required to lower blood sugar after a meal is reduced if the meal contains chili pepper. Several studies found that capsaicin could have an anti-ulcer protective effect on stomachs infected with H. pylori by affecting the chemicals the stomach secretes in response to infection, however a high consumption of chili is associated with stomach cancer and chronic ingestion of chili products may induce reflux. In addition to this ingestion of even small amounts of hot chilis may aggravate the pain and discomfort of hemorrhoid patients.

Used externally Chili has very powerful pain-relieving properties when applied to the surface of the skin. It is classed as a counterirritant that temporarily reduces pain messages to the brain. Chili is often recommended for topical application for the following conditions:

Osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis

Muscle aches

Nerve pain from shingles and other painful skin conditions

The pain relief symptoms don't stop there either, for when consumed internally chilis

bind with pain receptors in the mouth and throat that are normally responsible for sensing heat. Once activated by the chili, these receptors send a message to the brain that the person has consumed something hot. The brain responds to the burning sensation by raising the heart rate, increasing perspiration and releasing the body's natural painkilling chemical, endorphin, a kind of internal morphine and natural high.

So add a little spice to your life and let your body and mind reap the benefits, but with everything, if you really want your food to be your medicine, ALWAYS buy organic!

- The Barefoot Doctor