

Cayenne Pepper Benefits, Health Uses, and More

I sprinkle cayenne pepper on my scrambled eggs every morning - not just for that kick of flavor, but because I truly believe in its many health perks. This fiery spice has been a kitchen staple for centuries, and its active compound, capsaicin, offers real potential benefits backed by both tradition and growing research.

DISCLAIMER: This information has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This information is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. For educational purposes only. If you are considering using spices for a medical condition, it is important to consult with a healthcare professional before doing so.

Basics of Cayenne Pepper

Cayenne (*Capsicum annuum*) is a type of hot chili pepper in the Solanaceae family (alongside tomatoes, potatoes, and eggplants). It's a tropical perennial shrub. The part of the plant utilized is the fruit. It is harvested when fully ripened with a crimson color and is dried in a warm, shady area for several weeks. Once dried, the fruit is typically ground into the powder that is familiar to many people. About 25% of the world's population uses cayenne or red pepper as a culinary spice.

Key components include:

- Capsaicin – the compound responsible for the heat and most therapeutic effects.
- Carotenoids and flavonoids (antioxidants).
- Essential oil.
- Vitamin C.

Cayenne exhibits properties like anti-catharrhal (reduces mucus), anti-emetic (reduces nausea), antimicrobial, carminative (reduces gas), diaphoretic (promotes sweating), rubefacient (increases skin blood flow), sialagogue (stimulates saliva), stimulant, and tonic.

Therapeutic Uses of Cayenne

1. Digestive Support

Capsaicin stimulates digestive fluids, aiding breakdown of food and potentially soothing indigestion, gas, or nausea. Contrary to old myths, cayenne doesn't cause ulcers - in fact, it may help prevent them by inhibiting *Helicobacter pylori* (the bacteria linked to most ulcers) and promoting mucus production and blood flow to the stomach lining.

2. Pain Relief (Especially Topical)

Capsaicin depletes substance P (a pain-signaling chemical), providing relief when applied topically. It is believed that the body can only pay attention to so many pain signals at once. The minor superficial pain caused by cayenne in a topical form (like incorporated into a cream) reduces the nervous system's ability to alert the brain to deeper, more severe pain. Currently, the FDA has approved capsaicin (the active ingredient in cayenne) for use in several over-the-counter pain-relieving creams. FDA-approved capsaicin creams are used for conditions like:

- Relieving psoriasis and shingles (Herpes zoster).

- Osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis (studies show modest relief after weeks of use).
- Fibromyalgia (limited studies suggest reduced tenderness).
- Cluster headaches (nasal application has been explored but requires extreme care).
- Diabetic neuropathy.

3. Cardiovascular Potential

Some studies suggest that cayenne can help with regulating blood flow by equalizing and strengthening the heart, arteries, capillaries, and nerves. It is believed that cayenne can be beneficial to those with varicose veins. Cayenne is also believed to aid in circulation and to those who suffer from chilblains. Research is still underway to find out if cayenne can help cut cholesterol and prevent heart disease. It is too soon to draw conclusions from this research.

4. Other Traditional Uses

- Cold/flu symptom relief (e.g., teas with ginger juice, lime, honey, milk, lemon, and/or elderberries).
- Antimicrobial support.
- Metabolism boost
- Self-defense (capsaicin is the active ingredient in pepper spray).

Safety Considerations

The **FDA** lists red pepper/cayenne as **Generally Recognized As Safe (GRAS)** for most adults when used in normal culinary quantities. However, individuals looking to use red pepper/cayenne medicinally should consult a healthcare provider.

- **Handling:** Wear gloves when chopping fresh peppers; use vinegar or milk to neutralize skin/mouth burn (casein in milk binds capsaicin).
- **Pregnancy/Breastfeeding:** There is no strong evidence that cayenne causes issues with menstruation. Culinary amounts are generally safe, but avoid supplements or large doses – consult a doctor. Limited data; some reports of infant rashes from maternal spicy food.
- **Children:** Avoid under age 2; use sparingly in older kids.
- Cayenne may cause minor discomforts like stomach upset, diarrhea, or burning sensations during bowel movements in some individuals. If these effects persist, reduce the amount used or discontinue usage.

Culinary and Other Uses

Cayenne was traditionally used to flavor cheeses, juices, meats, and soups. However, it also has a history of air purification or perfuming. In 16th century Europe, houses and castles were scented with herbs that were burned slowly over charcoal. To this day, areas of France still utilize cayenne to fragrance the air.

Conclusion

Cayenne offers a wide range of therapeutic benefits, from aiding digestion to providing relief for chronic pain. While it has a proven track record for various health applications, it must be used

cautiously. Proper handling and awareness of potential side effects are necessary for safe use. With continued research, cayenne may eventually play an even greater role in treating heart disease and other health conditions. Always consult a healthcare provider before using cayenne medicinally to ensure safe and effective treatment.

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