

A yen for cayenne

HEALING HEAT

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Autumn harvest in New Mexico fills the air with the deep, earthy aroma of roasted chilis, the delicious spicy red pepper that rounds out each day's meal.

Although I lived in Santa Fe for just one year, I became so accustomed to the chili heat that I added dashes of cayenne to my breakfast porridge, lunchtime eggs, and beans and salad for dinner.

That was seven years ago. Now cayenne is not solely an everyday flavouring, but it stands as a mainstay in my medicine cabinet as a powerful tonic.

Indigenous to the northeastern coasts of South America, cayenne has been used medicinally for at least 9,000 years. The pungent constituent of the chili, which gives this pepper its kick and its anti-inflammatory effect, is known as capsaicin. ➤

Taking the HEAT

Follow these precautions when using cayenne:

- Take cayenne with food to prevent digestive irritation.
- Wash hands well and avoid touching eyes, injured or open skin, and mucous membranes when using cayenne creme, rub, gel, or powder.
- Apply a small amount of creme; too much may lead to coughing, sneezing, watering eyes, and a scratchy throat.
- Be prepared for the creme to cause a burning sensation the first few times it is used; this goes away with repeated use.
- Always check with your natural health practitioner for dosages, side effects, and interaction information.

the HEAT is on

| AILMENT | FORM TO USE | DOSAGE | APPLICATION |
|--------------------|--|---|--|
| joint pain | creme or rub | To make a rub: place 1/8 tsp (0.5 mL) cayenne into 4 Tbsp (60 mL) olive or almond oil. Add 10 drops of black pepper and 5 drops of rosemary essential oils. | Massage a small amount into the affected area 3 or 4 times a day for 2 to 3 weeks. |
| headache | creme or use homemade rub | small amount | Massage a small amount onto temples to relieve headaches as required. |
| digestive problems | capsule | 1 to 2 (30 to 120 mg) capsules | Take 3 times a day. |
| digestive problems | infusion (tea)—alternative to capsules | Add 1/4 tsp (1 mL) to 1/2 tsp (2 mL) powder to 1 cup (250 mL) of boiling water. | Take 2 or 3 times a day. |

Using a hot spicy food that spurs on head-tingling sweats as an anti-inflammatory may appear at first to be counterintuitive. Yet, the Law of Similars, an ancient tenet in homeopathic medicine, offers bold wisdom, affirming that “like cures like.”

This approach, noted and utilized by the fathers of medicine, Hippocrates and Paracelsus, forms the basis of homeopathy. It's no surprise that the heat cayenne inspires is so soothing.

HEAT FOR HEALTH

Taken regularly, cayenne may help those who suffer from chronic cold hands and feet by promoting healthy blood circulation.

Use less than one-eighth of a teaspoon combined with mullein, mint, coltsfoot, or any other favourite bronchial tea to remove mucous congestion from the lungs following a chest cold or a bout of allergies.

Cayenne offers support to digestion by stimulating gastric juices. Sometimes referred to as an “internal disinfectant,” cayenne is said to protect against harmful parasites and to alleviate gas and bloating by killing harmful bacteria.

HEAT FOR THE HEART

Cayenne has been studied for its cardiovascular benefits, including stimulating blood flow and strengthening the heart, arteries, capillaries, and nerves. A connection has been suggested between cuisines in which cayenne is present and significantly lower incidences of blood clots. A powerful

aromatic, cayenne is thought to prevent blood platelets from sticking together, thus preventing strokes and heart attacks.

Studies have also suggested that cayenne may significantly lower cholesterol and triglycerides by binding cholesterol and bile acids in the intestinal tract, allowing the body to excrete more cholesterol through the digestive system.

One recent small study has shown that cayenne may lower the LDL/HDL cholesterol ratio (proportion of bad cholesterol to good) and decrease the absorption of lipids (fats) from the blood.

HEAT FOR PAIN

Animal studies have suggested that cayenne may be helpful in easing nerve pain in conditions such as diabetic neuropathy, shingles, and trigeminal neuralgia. Applied topically, capsaicin decreases Substance P, the key chemical responsible for transmitting pain signals in nerve cells. Part of its pain-fighting power is due to salicylates, the same compounds found in Aspirin.

Cayenne is a powerful medicinal herb whether it is used to cut cholesterol or promote heart health—experience ease with cayenne's heat. Always check with your natural health practitioner for dosages, side effects, and interaction information. **a**

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