AKA: Capsicum annuum, Capsicum frutescens

PART USED: Fruit

WHAT'S THE ACTIVE INGREDIENT?
Capsaicin, the compound that makes cayenne and other chili peppers hot. It can help reduce pain and itching by temporarily decreasing levels of substance P, a chemical involved in sending pain sensations along nerves.

WHAT IT DOES BEST:
Capsaicin-based rub-in creams are used to relieve joint, muscle, nerve and back pain, and fibromyalgia (a musculo-skeletal pain and fatigue disorder).

THE BACKGROUND:
Cayenne has been used for centuries as both a food and a medicine throughout much of the world. In addition to the health uses above, it has been applied topically to treat frostbite and taken internally as a digestive aid.

RECENT FINDINGS:

- arthritis and osteoarthritis: Topical capsaicin is considered a safe and effective way to reduce pain from rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis and neuralgia (nerve pain). A review of human studies published in the December 2002 issue of the American Journal of Orthopedics found capsaicin to be one of several effective treatments for osteoarthritis pain when compared to placebo. Capsaicin cream also significantly reduced knee pain associated with both osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis in a double-blind study published in the May/June 1991 issue of Clinical Therapeutics.

- weight loss: Consuming cayenne may help suppress appetite. When a group of men and women took 900mg of cayenne pepper a half hour before meals, they felt fuller and reduced their calorie and fat intake, according to a study appearing in the June 2005 issue of International Journal of Obesity.

- prostate cancer: A study in the March 2006 issue of Cancer Research showed that capsaicin significantly inhibited the protein involved with prostate cancer cell proliferation in vitro and in vivo.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS:
- Capsaicin creams may cause a mild stinging or burning sensation, although this usually disappears with continued use. Although rare, topical preparations can cause allergic reactions in sensitive people. To test for sensitivity, apply the cream to a small area.
- Oral use of capsaicin can cause burning of the mouth and throat. People with heartburn, gastritis, ulcers and similar conditions should use caution when taking capsaicin extract or including it in food.
- Don't use capsaicin creams or supplements if you are allergic to chili peppers.

WHICH TYPE AND HOW MUCH?
capsaicin creams: Rub cream into the affected area three to four times daily, or according to package or doctor directions. Wash your hands after use, unless you're using capsaicin cream for joint pain in the hands. In that case, leave the cream on for at least 30 minutes before washing, being careful not to touch your eyes, open cuts, sores and other sensitive areas. (If capsaicin gets in your eyes, gently flush with cool water.) Use for at least two to three weeks for maximum pain relief, as the effects are cumulative rather than immediate.
capsules of dry cayenne: 450–500mg, one to three times daily.
cayenne extract (tincture): 0.3–1mL, one to three times daily.
cayenne tea (infusion): Pour 1 cup of boiling water over ½–1 tsp. of cayenne powder and steep for 15 minutes. Mix 1 tsp. of this infusion in water or vegetable juice, and drink three times daily.

NATURAL FACTORS CAYENNE 470mg capsules may help ease rheumatic pains.
SOLGAR CAYENNE vegetable capsules contain 520mg of raw cayenne powder.
CHRISTOPHER'S CAYENNE OINTMENT may help relieve stiff joints.