

# HEALTH BENEFITS OF HOT PEPPERS

Hot peppers, alternately known as chili peppers and cayenne peppers, belong to the capsicum family of vegetables. Their culinary and medicinal use extends back to antiquity; the World's Healthiest Foods notes that hot peppers have been cultivated in Central and South America for 7,000 years. Chili peppers can be used fresh, or dried and powdered, to add spice and heat to home cooking. Hot peppers--rich in phytonutrients and vitamins--are a healthy dietary choice.

**Vitamin A and Carotenoids** Chili peppers are an excellent source of vitamin A.

According to The World's Healthiest Foods, 2 tsp. of dried cayenne pepper contain 1470.24 IU--or 29.4 percent of the recommended daily value--of this antioxidant vitamin, essential for the health of tissues of the respiratory, gastrointestinal and reproductive tracts. Hot peppers are also rich in beta-carotene, which converts to vitamin A in the body. The bright red color of hot peppers is a testament to the presence of this carotenoid antioxidant. The World's Healthiest Foods states that it can help reduce symptoms of asthma and arthritis. Hot peppers are also rich in another carotenoid called beta-cryptoxanthin, with the United States Department of Agriculture stating that 1 tsp. of cayenne pepper contains 113 mcg. There is scientific research supporting the belief that carotenoids have protective effects. In a clinical study conducted by Dorothy Pattison and colleagues and published in the August 2005 issue of "American Journal of Clinical Nutrition," researchers found that an increase in dietary cryptoxanthin was associated with a lower risk of developing polyarthritis.

**Capsaicin** It is in their capsaicin content that hot peppers shine.

The World's Healthiest Foods notes that capsaicin has powerful pain-relieving effects and may relieve the inflammation and pain of diseases such as sensory nerve fiber disorders and psoriasis. In a clinical study conducted by Neil Ellison and colleagues and published in the August 1997 issue of "Journal of Clinical Oncology," researchers found that capsaicin worked better than a placebo to reduce neuropathic pain in cancer patients. In addition, capsaicin has antihypertensive qualities. In a clinical study conducted by Dachun Yang and colleagues and published in the August, 2010 issue of "Cell Metabolism," dietary capsaicin relaxed blood vessels and reduced blood pressure in rats. Chipotle Chiles warns that capsaicin is a powerful irritant to eyes and mucous membranes and stresses the importance of washing hands well after handling hot peppers, especially before touching eyes or sensitive areas.

**Vitamins and Minerals** Hot peppers are a good source of vitamin B-6, or pyridoxine, with 2 tsp. providing .008 mg, or 4 percent of the daily DV. The American Cancer Society states that pyridoxine helps the body break down protein and plays a vital role in maintaining the health of red blood cells. Hot peppers are also a good source of vitamin C--offering 4.5 percent of the DV in two teaspoons--vitamin K, which helps promote normal blood clotting, and manganese, an essential trace mineral.

**Source:** <http://www.livestrong.com/article/253391-health-benefits-of-hot-peppers>

