

Hot and Spicy and Good for You
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May signals the arrival of Cinco de Mayo, the celebration of Mexican Independence---and a good excuse to eat some great spicy food. Mexican food is so diverse that I'd be perfectly happy eating it many nights a week. The good news is that all those chili peppers are also really healthy.

There are many different types of chili peppers, used in different cuisines around the world. Some are mild, some are scorchingly hot, but all contain *capsaicin*, a chemical that is a powerful antiinflammatory agent. It has been shown to delay the onset of arthritis in lab animals, as well as alleviate the pain of diabetic neuropathy.

Cultures that use a large amount of chili peppers in cooking also have a much lower incidence of heart attack, stroke and pulmonary embolism. This is most likely due to the chili's ability to decrease platelet "stickiness", as well as decrease total cholesterol and triglyceride levels. In studies, those eating a bland diet showed much more rapid and extensive amounts of oxidation (free radical damage) than those eating a diet including moderate amounts of chilis on a regular basis.

Years ago, chili peppers got the mistaken reputation as being a cause of stomach ulcers.