

The real red hot chili peppers

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(HealthDay)—Variety is often called the spice of life. Now it turns out that an actual spice—chili peppers—may be the key to a longer one.

A multi-year study done in China, where [chili peppers](#) are one of the most popular ingredients in recipes, looked at spicy food consumption among nearly half a billion people.

The research, published in the British journal *BMJ*, found that people who ate [spicy foods](#) 6 or 7 days a week had a 14 percent relative risk reduction in total mortality compared to those who spiced it up less than once a week. And the relationship was even stronger in people who didn't drink alcohol.

While you can choose from dried chili peppers, chili sauce and chili oil, the protective factor was greatest for people who ate the fresh peppers, the study authors said.

Other studies done around the world have found many benefits to these [hot peppers](#) and the active ingredient that gives them their heat, capsaicin. The reported benefits run the gamut from a decrease in appetite and obesity to a lower likelihood of cancer. They also may have antibacterial activity and might encourage healthy gut bacteria.

Since chili [peppers](#) can rev up your [taste buds](#), too, it's time to start experimenting with spicy new recipes. Note that many Asian cuisines, from Chinese to Thai to Vietnamese, use them, so there's no limit to the number of dishes you can try.

More information: To learn more about chili and other types of peppers, visit [the University of the District of Columbia](#).

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