Friday Favorites: How Hot Peppers May Extend Your Life Transcript

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Spicy Foods, Mortality, and Salt Reduction

Four out of four studies on spicy food and mortality found a significant decrease in the risk of premature death. As I detailed in my last video, the intake of sweet peppers also seemed to help but to a lesser extent. So there may be some benefit to the spicy capsasonin compound itself. I have a whole section on chili peppers in my fat burners chapter in how not to diet. How cayenne pepper can counteract the metabolic slowing that accompanies weight loss and accelerate fat burning as a bonus. So maybe the weight loss benefits account for the mortality benefits. Apparently not since there was a mortality risk reduction with chili pepper consumption even after controlling for body mass index. Maybe the spice was used as a replacement for salt. Anything that reduces sodium intake could improve longevity as excess salt consumption is the deadliest dietary risk factor. The worst thing about the human diet, wiping out millions of people every year.

Not only could you use the spice to replace salt, the spicy compound actually makes things taste saltier than they actually are. Sprinkling on some red pepper powder can increase your salt taste sensitivity. So you can achieve the same salty taste with less salt. You can put people on a PET scanner and pick up differences in your secondary taste cortex, the part of your brain associated with pleasure signaling to salty foods. So you can use hot peppers to hack your brain for your health. And indeed, those with a high spice preference had lower salt intake and better blood pressures. And this again appears to be independent of the anti-obesity benefit of hot pepper consumption.

Hot Peppers, Blood Pressure, and Sodium Intake

Though the lower risk of developing high blood pressure among those with higher hot pepper intake was also independent of sodium intake. So there may be some other benefit pathways as well. Like maybe it also helps your kidneys excrete more salt too, though the evidence to support this was derived from studies on mice. So who knows? However it works, eating spicy foods or adding supplemental spicy flavor to food by like sprinkling on cayenne pepper or hot sauce represents a novel lifestyle intervention that can reduce both salt intake and blood pressure. Here are some examples of no salt added hot sauces.

Even regular Tabasco is pretty low in sodium, though only the original flavor. Some of the other spin-off flavors like Buffalo, habanero, Chipotle have five times more. Now, just because all studies on spicy food mortality to date suggest hot peppers may help you live longer, doesn't mean you can go out and eat a ghost pepper. designated the Guinness book hottest pepper in the world in 2007.

Here's the pepper as you may be used to measured in the hundreds of thousands of Scoville heat units. Some varieties of habanero can be 50 times as hot as jalapenos. To get to ghost peppers though, you have to switch over to millions of units. The ghost pepper beat out the habanero in 2007, which itself got outshadowed by the Trinidad Scorpion in 2011 and then 2013 at burning as the reigning champ, the Carolina Reaper.

Ghost Peppers and Pepper Spray Dangers

But just eating a ghost pepper, which this poor guy did as part of a contest, resulted in such violent vomiting he ruptured his esophagus, which is a potentially lifethreatening surgical emergency. The only thing hotter than the reaper, is pure pepper spray, which can lead to such violent coughing you can rupture a lung. Pepper spray in the eye only seems to be a problem if you can't wash it out. This woman was pepper-sprayed and handcuffed away in a cell for 9 hours and appears to have suffered permanent damage to her vision. The best thing you can do if you're trying to help someone sprayed in the face is to try to calm them down. Make sure they're breathing okay. Remove their contact lenses as soon as possible and then abundantly irrigate their eyes to wash out the chemical. really abundantly, as in washing their eyes with water or saline for a full 10 to 20 minutes. It's a long time to be washing your eye out. Again, after contact lenses have been removed, or even better, not worn to an event where you might be pepper- sprayed in the first place. Even just ambient exposure to pepper gas can cause dry eye symptoms that last for weeks, even if you're not sprayed directly.

It's ironic that the Chemical Weapons Convention prohibits the use of these riot control agents during warfare. Yet, they are routinely used to quell civilian protest. The most serious eye injuries, though, are trauma from fired projectiles like pepper balls, leading to the suggestion that protesters wear ballistic eye protection, are recommending that medical centers proactively reach out to protest leaders and participants regarding appropriate safety precautions.

In terms of what you can do for pepper spray irritation on your skin, there are anecdotal reports that baby shampoo is helpful. However, as yet there have been no published scientific studies that demonstrate their effectiveness until now. Baby shampoo to relieve the discomfort of tear gas and pepper spray exposure. A randomized controlled trial.

Pepper Spray Decontamination and Final Takeaway

Police recruits received a burst of pepper spray to the face, then were randomized to washing off with water or water along with some Johnson and Johnson baby shampoo. and it didn't work at all. How about using mocks or a numbing lidocaine gel or milk? Nothing. Beat out plain old water. Copious water decontamination is the preferred method of pain control after topical pepper spray exposure.

Anyways, [laughter] that was quite the tangent. Bottom line, should we all begin taking tablets of capsain and dowsing our food with hot sauce? If you like hot sauce, go for it. But I don't think we should start taking supplements until we have randomized control trials proving benefit.