Capsicum

It is also known as red or chili pepper, is an herb. The fruit of the capsicum is used to make medicine.

Capsicum is used for various problems with digestion including upset stomach, intestinal gas, stomach pain, diarrhea, and cramps. It is also used for conditions of the heart and blood vessels including poor circulation, excessive blood clotting, high cholesterol, and preventing heart disease.

Other uses include relief of toothache, seasickness, alcoholism, malaria, and fever. It is also used to help people who have difficulty swallowing.

Some people apply capsicum to the skin for pain caused by shingles, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, and fibromyalgia. It is also used topically for nerve pain (neuropathy) associated with diabetes and HIV, other types of nerve pain (neuralgia), and back pain.

Capsicum is also used on the skin to relieve muscle spasms, as a gargle for laryngitis, and to discourage thumb-sucking or nail-biting.

Some people put capsicum inside the nose to treat hay fever, migraine headache, cluster headache, and sinus infections (sinusitis). One form of capsicum is currently being studied as a drug for migraine, osteoarthritis, and other painful conditions.

A particular form of capsicum causes intense eye pain and other unpleasant effects when it comes in contact with the face. This form is used in self-defense pepper sprays.

How does it work?

The fruit of the capsicum plant contains a chemical called capsaicin. Capsaicin seems to reduce pain sensations when applied to the skin.

Likely Effective for:

Pain from rheumatoid arthritis (RA), osteoarthritis, psoriasis, shingles and nerve pain due to diabetes (diabetic neuropathy), when applied to the skin in the affected area. The active ingredient in topical preparations of capsicum, capsaicin, is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for these uses.

Possibly Effective for:

Back pain, when applied to the skin.
Reducing painful tender points in people with fibromyalgia, when applied to the skin.
Relieving symptoms of prurigo nodularis, a skin disease, when applied to the skin. It may take 22 weeks to 33 months of treatment to see a benefit. Symptoms may return after stopping use of capsaicin. Cluster headache, when used in the nose. Capsicum seems to reduce the number and severity of cluster headaches. It’s best to apply capsicum to the nostril that is on the same side of the head as the headache. Relieving symptoms of perennial rhinitis, a runny nose not associated with allergies or infection, when used in the nose. Sometimes the benefit can last for 6-9 months.

Medicinal lotions and creams that contain capsicum extract are LIKELY SAFE for most adults when applied to the skin. The active chemical in capsicum, capsaicin, is approved by the FDA as an over-the-counter product. That is, it can be sold without a prescription. Side effects can include skin irritation, burning, and itching.

Capsicum can also be extremely irritating to the eyes, nose, and throat. Don't use capsicum on sensitive skin or around the eyes.
Capsicum extract is LIKELY SAFE for most adults when taken by mouth, short-term and in amounts typically found in food. Side effects can include stomach irritation and upset, sweating, flushing, and runny nose. It is POSSIBLY UNSAFE to take capsicum by mouth in large doses or for long periods of time. In rare cases, this can lead to more serious side effects like liver or kidney damage.

Capsicum extract is POSSIBLY SAFE when used in the nose. No serious side effects have been reported, but application in the nose can be very painful. Nasal application can cause burning pain, sneezing, watery eyes, and runny nose. These side effects tend to decrease and go away after 5 or more days of repeated use.

**Special Precautions & Warnings:**
Pregnancy and breast-feeding: Capsicum is LIKELY SAFE when applied to the skin during pregnancy. But not enough is known about its safety when taken by mouth. Stay on the safe side and don’t use capsicum if you are pregnant.

If you are breast-feeding, using capsicum on your skin is LIKELY SAFE. But it is POSSIBLY UNSAFE for your baby if you take capsicum by mouth. Skin problems (dermatitis) have been reported in breast-fed infants when mothers eat foods heavily spiced with capsicum peppers.

Children: Applying capsicum to the skin of children under two years of age is POSSIBLY UNSAFE. Not enough is known about the safety of giving capsicum to children by mouth. Don’t do it.

Damaged or broken skin: Don’t use capsicum on damaged or broken skin.

Surgery: Capsicum might increase bleeding during and after surgery. Stop using capsicum at least 2 weeks before a scheduled surgery.

**Moderate Interaction Be cautious with this combination**

Cocaine interacts with CAPSICUM

Cocaine has many dangerous side effects. Using capsicum along with cocaine might increase the side effects of cocaine including heart attack and death.

Medications that slow blood clotting (Anticoagulant / Antiplatelet drugs) interacts with CAPSICUM

Capsicum might slow blood clotting. Taking capsicum along with medications that also slow clotting might increase the chances of bruising and bleeding.

Some medications that slow blood clotting include aspirin, clopidogrel (Plavix), diclofenac (Voltaren, Cataflam, others), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others), naproxen (Anaprox, Naprosyn, others), dalteparin (Fragmin), enoxaparin (Lovenox), heparin, warfarin (Coumadin), and others.

Theophylline interacts with CAPSICUM

Capsicum can increase how much theophylline the body can absorb. Taking capsicum along with theophylline might increase the effects and side effects of theophylline.

**Minor Interaction Be watchful with this combination**

Medications for high blood pressure (ACE inhibitors) interacts with CAPSICUM

Some medications for high blood pressure might cause a cough. There is one report of someone whose cough
worsened when using a cream with capsicum along with these medications for high blood pressure. But is it not clear if this interaction is a big concern.

Some medications for high blood pressure include captopril (Capoten), enalapril (Vasotec), lisinopril (Prinivil, Zestril), ramipril (Altace), and others.

The following doses have been studied in scientific research:

**APPLIED TO THE SKIN:**
For pain, including arthritis, neuropathy, and fibromyalgia: Creams contain the active capsicum constituent capsaicin and are typically applied 3-4 times daily. It can take up to 14 days for maximum pain relief. Most creams contain 0.025% to 0.075% capsaicin concentrations.

For back pain: Capsicum-containing plasters providing 11 mg capsaicin/plaster or 22 mcg/cm2 of plaster applied have been used. The plaster is applied once daily in the morning and left in place for 4-8 hours.

For prurigo nodularis: 0.025% to 0.3% of the active capsicum constituent capsaicin 4-6 times daily has been used.

Be sure to wash your hands after applying capsaicin cream. A diluted vinegar solution works well. You won’t be able to get the capsaicin off with just water. Don’t use capsicum preparations near the eyes or on sensitive skin. It could cause burning.

**INSIDE THE NOSE:** For cluster headache, 0.1 mL of a 10 mM capsaicin suspension, providing 300 mcg/day of capsaicin, applied to the nostril on the painful side of the head. Apply the suspension once daily until the burning sensation disappears. A capsaicin 0.025% cream (Zostrix, Rodlen Laboratories) applied daily for 7 days has been used to treat acute cluster headache attacks. Putting capsaicin in the nose can be very painful, so a local painkilling medicine such as lidocaine is often put into the nose first.

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