

# Eat Hot Peppers to Burn Extra Calories, Fat

Dieters Get Boost From Hot Pepper-Like Compound in Study

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April 28, 2010 (Anaheim, Calif.) -- Adding some spicy hot peppers to a healthy meal isn't a magic bullet, but it may help you burn a few extra calories and a bit more fat, according to a new study.

Researchers from the University of California Los Angeles tested a compound related to the [capsaicin](#) found in hot peppers to see if it could give dieters a boost. It's called dihydrocapsiate or DCT, and it's not spicy hot like jalapenos.

They wanted to see if the pepper-like compound, by heating up the body, could translate to better calorie and fat burning.

"DCT caused an increase in calories burned after a test meal," study author David Heber, MD, PhD, founding director of the UCLA Center for Human Nutrition, tells WebMD. The boost, however, was modest -- translating to about 100 extra calories a day for a 110-pound woman and 200 extra calories for a 200-pound man, he says. Fat burning was up a bit, too.

The findings were presented Tuesday at EB2010, the annual Experimental Biology meeting here.

This latest research follows other studies finding hot peppers may boost [metabolism](#) or dampen appetite.

## Peppers for Weight Loss Study

Although DCT is structurally related to capsaicin from hot peppers, it doesn't give that "bite," says Amy Lee, MD, a research fellow at UCLA who presented the findings at the meeting.

The researchers started with 51 men and women but finished with 33, after accounting for dropouts, Lee says. All were [obese](#) and on a liquid meal replacement regimen that had just 800 calories daily. The low-calorie allotment was a primary reason for dropping out, she says.

Dieters were randomly assigned to take either a placebo capsule or DCT in a 3 milligram or 9 milligram dose, without knowing which they were taking.

At the start of the study, and four weeks later, the researchers measured the dieters' metabolic rate and their energy expenditure (or heat production) after a test meal of 400 liquid calories.

People on the 9 milligram capsule had an increase in energy expenditure or heat production and increased fat burning, compared to those taking placebo, Lee says.

## **Peppers for Weight Loss: Second Opinion**

"It needs further study as far as a potential [weight loss](#) product," says Lauri Byerley, PhD, RD, an associate professor of research at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, who reviewed the study results for WebMD.

She points out, too, that people in the UCLA study were very obese, and on a very low-calorie, [liquid diet](#) supervised by health care professionals.

So the results could differ for people [dieting](#) by cutting back on portions or fat, for instance.

People on liquid diets typically experience [rapid weight loss](#), partly because they have so much to lose, so dieters who expect slower [weight](#) loss may not benefit as much from the DCT, she says.

"We can't conclude yet whether this approach would help people seeking slower weight loss, because they have less to lose," Byerly tells WebMD.

Even so, she agrees with Heber that piling on the peppers can't hurt. "[But] it's got to be someone who likes the spice," Byerly says.

## **Advice for Dieters**

The type of DCT used in the study isn't available on the market, Heber says.

But someone who wants to get a potential DCT-like boost could add chili spices to their dishes, he says.

As a way to burn calories, he says, it's not a primary strategy but an add-on. "I would put it in the same category as [green tea](#) and [caffeine](#)," Heber says.

Still, he sees no downside. The DCT, he says, "is not absorbed into the body. It doesn't get out of the gut."