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## Does eating spicy food help you lose weight?

Many of us have a love-hate relationship when it comes to spicy food. Either you're smothering everything you eat with hot sauce, or you're shying away from a korma. But could a little red pepper or two in your meals actually be good for you? It's time to turn up the heat.

Many of us understandably avoid meals containing chilli, due to the effects of capsaicin (the heat-causing chemical inside) and the reactions it can cause in our mouths and digestive system. However, there are claims that spicy food can actually boost your metabolism and help with weight loss. So what does the evidence show?

### Chillies and weight loss

It turns out there have been several [scientific studies](#) published that have linked hot chilli peppers with weight loss.

"Capsaicinoids are a group of chemicals naturally occurring in chilli peppers," explains nutritionist [Emma Derbyshire](#). "They have properties that may help to support [weight management](#)."

Derbyshire reveals that while everyone's bodies react to spice very differently, the research indicates that: "A daily consumption of capsaicin may contribute to weight loss through reductions in energy intake."

She explains that this means eating spicy food could potentially make you want to eat fewer calories than you otherwise would. This could be the main reason hot food is sometimes associated with weight loss.

# Spice up your metabolism?

But do chillies actually speed up your metabolic rate? And what do we mean by metabolism anyway? Nutritionist Rose Constantine-Smith explains:

"Metabolism is 'the process of generating energy from nutrients'. Put simply, it is the process that our body has to go through to get energy from the food we eat."

She explains that the energy our body uses to simply exist (for our vital organs to function) makes up between 56-80% of our total energy. It is described as our basal metabolic rate (BMR). It does not take into account anything else like walking, talking or eating."

So a low metabolism might be more accurately described as 'low BMR'. Constantine-Smith explains that everyone's BMR is different. And there are several things which can affect it, she reveals:

## **Genes**

The way you use energy can be affected somewhat by your genetics, although this isn't fully understood yet.

## **Body composition**

Muscle burns more energy than fat so the higher the muscle-to-fat ratio someone has, the more energy they will burn.

## **Sex**

As, in general, men tend to have a higher muscle-to-fat ratio than women, their BMR is higher.

## **Age**

As we get older, our BMR tends to reduce. This is thought to be due to the loss of muscle which is often seen in ageing.

## **Body weight**

The bigger the body, the more energy required to sustain it.

But does a slow metabolism cause weight gain? Unfortunately, says Constantine-Smith, it's not that simple.

"The majority of the time, current evidence does not indicate this. Especially as a larger body actually requires more energy to survive. There are some exceptions - an [underactive thyroid](#) gland, for instance, slows your metabolism and usually leads to weight gain even though you're not eating more. But people can gain weight for many reasons, such as eating more than your body requires, lack of exercise, stress, lack of sleep, and illness."

So can chillies help? Constantine-Smith says: "It's true that the capsaicin chilli has been found, in some [studies](#), to increase the rate of our metabolism and therefore the speed at which we burn calories. However, these claims are weak. And even if it's true, the effect is only very, very minimal and appears to only be a short-term, temporary thing."

## Our hot take

So there you go: a hint of spice may be beneficial every now and again but don't expect it to be a quick fix.

If you're not a fan of spicy food, don't panic! There are much more effective ways of [losing weight](#) without having to make yourself uncomfortable. You're much better off improving your diet, exercising more and sleeping well.

When it comes to chillies, eat them because you like the flavour, not because you think they're going to help you to shed the pounds.

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