

How spice can work wonders with health

[Health & Medicine](#), [Addiction](#)



What if a drug was discovered that was effective against breast cancer, colon cancer, prostate cancer, lung cancer, Alzheimer's, arthritis, Chron's disease, and IBS? What if it had no dangerous side effects, was cheap and plentiful, and tasty?

Well, there would be dancing in the streets. Mass celebrations. The stock of the drug company would soar and doctors would hand out the drug like candy.

So why, when research indicates that the common spice turmeric can do all of these things, is there no celebration? Part of the reason is that there is no drug company eyeing billions in profits and willing to spend millions on an advertising campaign. Part of it is that herbs just don't work the same way as drugs. They take time. The best results come from years of use. Herbs simply don't have the "magic bullet" aura of a blockbuster drug.

Still, the research, though somewhat preliminary, is hard to ignore. So it is difficult to see why more healthcare professionals are not recommending this herb to their patients.

Turmeric and Cancer

Interest in the effects of turmeric on various cancers stemmed from an analysis that indicated rates of breast, prostate, lung and colon cancer were significantly lower in populations where turmeric is prevalent in the diet. So scientists began to test the theory. Laboratory research indicated that turmeric effectively stopped cancer growth in test tubes. Many lines of breast, skin, prostate, colon and lung cancer cells, including hormone

dependent and drug-resistant lines, were tested. All lines were shown to be inhibited by turmeric.

Studies in animals then indicated that turmeric could prevent the spread of cancer from one organ to another. In studies of both breast cancer cells and melanoma (skin cancer), turmeric inhibited metastasis (uncontrolled growth) of cancer cells.

This research, at The M. D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, spurred interest in the use of turmeric in both preventing and treating various cancers. M. D. Anderson's scientists state, " Extensive research over the last 50 years has indicated [curcumin] can both prevent and treat cancer. The anticancer potential of curcumin stems from its ability to suppress proliferation of a wide variety of tumor cells, down-regulate transcription factors NF-kappa B, AP-1 and Egr-1; down-regulate the expression of COX2, LOX, NOS, MMP-9, uPA, TNF, chemokines, cell surface adhesion molecules and cyclin D1; down-regulate growth factor receptors (such as EGFR and HER2); and inhibit the activity of c-Jun N-terminal kinase, protein tyrosine kinases and protein serine/threonine kinases."

While this is a little technical for most people, scientists around the world took notice, leading to an explosion of research on turmeric. Japanese scientists declared turmeric a " broad-spectrum anti-cancer agent." German scientists raved about the antioxidant activity of the herb. It is estimated that there are currently over four hundred trials of turmeric around the globe, either in progress or completed.

Turmeric and the Digestive Tract: IBS, Chron's Disease, Inflammatory Bowel Disorder

This is nothing really new. Ayurvedic physicians and Chinese herbalist have used turmeric for digestive disorders for centuries. The key is in the anti-inflammatory characteristics of the herb. When turmeric calms the inflammation in the digestive tract the symptoms of these diseases subside. Several small studies of this effect have been completed and larger trials are beginning.

Turmeric and Arthritis

The anti-inflammatory characteristics mentioned above have been found to be useful in treating arthritis. Curcuminoids in turmeric work in much the same way as common painkillers (NSAID's) by suppressing the enzymes in the body that contribute to inflammation. The good news is that turmeric does not have the side effects of the painkillers, not to mention the other health benefits.

Turmeric and Alzheimer's: The Curry Connection

One of the more interesting aspects of the new research on turmeric is its use in treating or preventing Alzheimer's, dementia and possibly even Multiple Sclerosis. Here again it was noted through statistical studies that elderly residents in areas where large amounts of curry is consumed have significantly lower rates of these diseases, less than one fourth the US rate. Through further study turmeric was identified as the herb in curry that contributed to this phenomenon and trials were begun.

Rates of MS in areas of high turmeric consumption are also significantly lower. Researchers at Vanderbilt were able to demonstrate the slowing of

progression as well as prevention of MS in animal studies. While it is not completely clear what the mechanism might be, researchers theorize that turmeric interrupts the production of IL-12, a protein that stimulates the attack on the myelin sheath. More studies are underway.

Who Should Try Turmeric?

Though research in well-structured human trials is just beginning, many people are already choosing to add turmeric to their daily diets. And, why not? With mounting evidence of the health benefits and no noted side effects with moderate doses in current research or widespread human use, there is really no reason to wait. Dr. Andrew Weil, noted author and head of the Department of Integrated Medicine at the University of Arizona, had this to say about turmeric:

- “ People whose diets are rich in turmeric have lower rates of breast cancer as well as prostate, lung and colon cancers.”
- “ Turmeric is useful for all inflammatory disorders and for autoimmune conditions. It also may have a role in prevention and treatment of Alzheimer’s.”
- “ My preference is for whole turmeric, rather than isolated curcumin, because I believe in the synergy of all active elements in botanical medicines.”

Of course, people with serious illnesses should continue to work with their physicians. These are not do-it-yourself conditions.