



TURMERIC as MEDICINE

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The information below was originally published in February and March 2015 in the Millhouse Integrative Newsletter, a monthly publication, primarily designed for clinic patients, highlighting useful strategies which may help prevent disease and improve health.

Spice Medicine

A spice is a dried seed, fruit, bark or flower of a plant or herb that is used in small quantities to flavour, colour or preserve food. Many spices are used in traditional medicine. Spices were the most valuable items of trade from ancient times through to the medieval period and only in recent years has modern medicine rediscovered their importance in preventing illness and treating disease.



TURMERIC (*Curcuma longa*, sometimes referred to as Indian saffron)

My favorite medicinal spice, turmeric, is a member of the ginger family. It grows in South Asia where each year the rhizome roots are harvested, boiled and dried in hot ovens, then ground into deep orange yellow powder. In India the spice Turmeric is known as the 'kitchen queen' used by everyone in cooking and especially in curries. In Asia the leaves are also used in cooking and the root used fresh, as we do with ginger.

Marco Polo on his Asian adventure in 1280 AD discovered the spice and brought turmeric back to Europe but long before this it was already established as a medicinal herb in India's Ayurvedic ancient healing practices and in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Turmeric is useful for rheumatism, body aches, digestive and liver disorders and skin infections. Its characteristic yellow is used to colour foods and as a spice to provide flavor, especially in curries, where its antioxidant action enables the food to last longer.

The active ingredient in turmeric is **curcumin**, the most studied curcuminoid compound but there are numerous others, many still to be fully understood.

Studies have demonstrated curcumin has anti-inflammatory properties similar to ibuprofen but not as powerful as cortisone, and also has a limited antibiotic action.

Traditionally, turmeric was, and is, used to purify the blood, treat stomach, digestive and liver conditions, as well as assisting in the resolution of skin and lung disease. It is administered to wounds to stop bleeding and prevent infection, applied to joint sprains to reduce swelling and used locally by Indian women to reduce hair growth.

Turmeric's fleshy roots contain 3-5 % essential oils with curcuminoid compounds that give the golden yellow colour and healing value.

Known Turmeric medicinal effects include

- Anti-inflammation reducing pain and swelling
- Anti-platelet activity thinning the blood
- Anti-oxidant activity for cell preservation
- Lowers blood cholesterol & triglyceride
- Improves diabetes and reduces glycation protein ageing – organ damage
- Lessens gut spasm, is liver protective, assists stomach ulcer healing
- Anti-bacterial, anti-fungal & antiviral action useful in treating infection
- Anti-cancer effect protects against DNA gene damage, increases glutathione detox action, anti-inflammatory also action potentiates chemo and radiation therapy, reduces pre-cancer lesions

Turmeric the anti-inflammatory

In 2012 Doctors [Chandran and Goel](#) in a pilot study randomised 45 rheumatoid arthritis patients into three groups who were given either curcumin 500mg twice daily, diclofenac (Voltaren) 50mg twice daily, or curcumin and diclofenac together. After 8 weeks the curcumin-only group demonstrated the greatest improvement in symptoms with no adverse side effects.

Turmeric contains more than two dozen anti-inflammatory compounds that inhibit and selectively block inflammatory cell pathways (cyclooxygenase COX-2 & lipoxygenase LOX enzymes, leukotrienes, cytokines, and the powerful Tumour Necrosis Factor/TNF-alpha) lessening disease processes.

I recommend patients with inflammatory conditions such as arthritis, inflammatory bowel disease & colitis, asthma, diabetes, and heart disease consider taking turmeric or curcumin daily.



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Turmeric in Alzheimer Disease

The population of India consumes large amounts of turmeric and reportedly has a much lower age-related incidence of Alzheimer Disease (AD) compared with Western countries. Professor Gregory Cole, associate director of the UCLA Alzheimer Research Centre observed that the brains of older Indians at autopsy were tinged yellow with turmeric and appeared more youthful. [With his colleagues](#) he has demonstrated that turmeric and curcumin cross the blood brain barrier, slow brain-aging in 'Alzheimer-bred' rats and extend life expectancy in laboratory mice by 10-12%.ⁱⁱ

Turmeric contains a number of natural agents that block the formation of beta-amyloid, the substance responsible for the plaques that slowly obstruct cerebral function in AD.

In 2013, Japanese neurologists from Kariya Toyota Hospital, reportedⁱⁱⁱ remarkable improvement of three patients with [Alzheimer Disease](#) who took 1gm turmeric daily for one year.

Turmeric in cancer

Turmeric is a powerful cancer preventative agent and is able to inhibit pre-cancer lesions. Curcumin is able to target multiple sites in cancer growth - neutralising cancer inducing agents, reducing inflammation, normalising cell pathways, blocking tumour invasion and inhibiting cancer blood supply.

A number of trials have demonstrated curcumin increases the effectiveness of chemo and radiation therapy.

For cancer prevention - curcumin 500mg daily. Cancer treatment - curcumin 2000-8000mg daily taken in 3 divided doses. (1 tablespoon turmeric (6.8gm) = 230mg curcumin).

Using Turmeric

Turmeric is fat soluble which slows gut absorption. However assimilation is dramatically improved when turmeric is heated in the presence of fat or oil (coconut, olive, avocado, butter) and black pepper (piperine) is also added.

Use turmeric as a sprinkle over avocado, in salad dressings, as a rub combined with olive/coconut oil on meats or tossed with roast vegetables and of course in curries.

I suggest at the beginning of cough, cold and influenza symptoms take 1/2-1 tsp turmeric powder, mixed with vegetable, fruit juice or warm milk, three times daily.



Turmeric has also been observed to inhibit a number of cancer cells lines and lower cholesterol.

Simple ways to use turmeric

• Simple tea

Bring 4 cups water to boil add 1 tsp ground turmeric powder, simmer 10 min then strain with fine sieve, add honey or lemon to taste – add milk or coconut milk to improve bioavailability - ginger powder may be added

• Dr Sanjay Gupta's Tea

1 cup almond milk or coconut milk
1/2 tsp turmeric powder
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp honey
1/4 tsp ginger

Directions -bring the almond milk to boil, remove from heat, add spices & honey - stir. Sip slowly before sleep.

• Turmeric for colds

1/2 tsp powder with vegetable/grapefruit juice or coconut milk 3x day

Add turmeric to food – 1 tsp minced fresh peeled root or 1/8 tsp or more of powder

- **Omelettes, scrambles, fritters, soups, smoothies, rice & tofu dishes**
- **Toss with roast vegetables**
- **Rub on meat, chicken & fish,**
- **Pinch in salad dressings & blend with melted butter poured over cooked vegetables**
- **Curries** – learn how to cook curries

Consider adding turmeric to your diet for improved brain health, extended longevity and for infections.

ⁱ Chandran and Goel in Phytother Res. 2012 Nov;26(11):1719-25

ⁱⁱ Ringman et al in Curr Alz Research 2005, 2 (2): 131- 136

ⁱⁱⁱ Hishikawa et al in [Ayu](#). 2012 Oct;33(4):499-504