

Turmeric

Turmeric- a remedy for conditions related to inflammation?

Also known as Indian Saffron, Turmeric root, Yellow root, and *Curcuma aromatica*

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Turmeric is that yellow-orange spice that comes from the root of the *Curcuma longa* plant. It has been used for centuries in cooking, to dye clothing and cosmetics and in traditional medicine to treat infections, and digestive, joint, and skin ailments. The major active ingredient in turmeric is the phytochemical curcumin, which gives turmeric its yellow color, and



has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Turmeric is now a popular dietary supplement promoted for prevention and treatment of a variety of conditions including arthritis, digestive disorders, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. Additional claims include treatment for leg cramps, obesity, depression, and memory loss. Turmeric appears to have significant anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.

Possible Indications

Turmeric has been suggested as a remedy for conditions related to inflammation.

- It has shown effectiveness as a topical treatment for a variety of skin conditions purportedly due to its antibacterial, anticancer and anti-inflammatory properties. Curcumin has been shown to improve wound healing, psoriasis, and benefit some skin cancers, and there is evidence that its anti-inflammatory properties could be helpful in any inflammatory skin disease.
- Turmeric is also used in the treatment of both rheumatoid and osteoarthritis and is reported to reduce post-exercise muscle soreness in active individuals.

- Some therapeutic benefit has been demonstrated in the management of components of metabolic syndrome including obesity, hypertension, dyslipidemia, and insulin resistance.
- Turmeric's active ingredient curcumin exhibits potential anticancer activity through cell signaling pathways.
- Several small studies of turmeric have shown promise in the treatment of depression and memory loss.
- And a recent study suggests comparable benefits of curcumin and omeprazole in treating dyspepsia.

Despite this array of potential actions and benefits, few clear conclusions have been reached about the true effectiveness of turmeric. Clinical trials are complicated by the fact that oral doses of turmeric are poorly absorbed and that which is absorbed is metabolized and eliminated rapidly. In addition, turmeric products vary in composition making it difficult to compare results from different studies. Despite better evidence of turmeric's effectiveness, the NIH's National Center for Complimentary and Integrative Medicine has determined that turmeric and conventionally formulated curcumin products are probably safe when taken orally or applied to the skin in the recommended amounts.

Contraindications

During pregnancy, turmeric may be unsafe in amounts greater than those commonly found in food. Little is known about whether it's safe to use amounts greater than those commonly found in food while breastfeeding.

Turmeric is high in oxalates so should be avoided by those with a history of oxalate kidney stones.

Adverse Effects

Turmeric and its component curcumin have the potential to change the pharmacokinetics of a variety of drugs including antidepressants, anticoagulants, antibiotics, chemotherapeutic agents, and antihistamines. For example, turmeric decreases platelet aggregation so may increase bleeding risk in those taking anticoagulants. Therefore, turmeric should be recommended cautiously to avoid drug interactions.

An allergy to turmeric may cause rash, hives, diarrhea and/or abdominal pain.

Turmeric may reduce iron absorption.

Pearls to Know

- Turmeric is the main ingredient in curry powder.
- The FDA has categorized turmeric and curcumin as GRAS (generally regarded as safe) for use as food additives. The WHO established an acceptable daily intake (ADI) for curcumin of 0–3 mg/kg body weight or 4–10 g turmeric powder for a healthy 70 kg-individual.
- Turmeric supplements typically recommend doses of 500 to 2,000 mg/day. Most adverse effects occur with higher doses.
- While turmeric has been used therapeutically for thousands of years without significant side effects, modern products that isolate curcumin or enhance bioavailability provide more concentrated doses that may increase the risk of side effects.
- Combining curcumin with black pepper may increase bioavailability by as much as 2000%.
- In India, where people often eat with their hands, many develop a yellow tinge to their fingernails due to repeated contact with the yellow pigment in turmeric.

References

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