Curcumin - a Golden Gift of Nature with Benefits Still Untold

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Nearly 700 studies from all around the world confirm the remarkable properties of the ancient spice curcumin. It is showing amazing potential for support of the body's defenses against a wide variety of ills including Alzheimer's, cancer, arthritis, diabetes and multiple sclerosis to name a few.

Curcumin is the primary component of turmeric (*Curcuma longa L.*) and is what gives the spice its rich yellow color. Native to southern India and Indonesia, turmeric is the star ingredient in curry and is widely used in Indian cuisine.

In addition to its uses as a condiment, food coloring and textile dye, turmeric has been employed in Ayurvedic medicine for more than 4,000 years, utilized for everything from cuts and sores to gastrointestinal pain, rheumatism and liver disorders.

Uncovering the Secrets of Curcumin

About 50 years ago researchers began noticing that many diseases prevalent in Western culture, like Alzheimer's and multiple sclerosis, were rare in India. Their search to figure out why led them to curcumin. Turmeric - and thereby curcumin - is a staple in every Indian household. Not only do they ingest lots of it in their diet, but they also put it on their bandages to support wound healing(1) and take it orally for many illnesses. In fact, it is so much a part of their culture that brides and grooms apply turmeric and milk to their skin prior to their wedding so they will look more beautiful.

So Western scientists began taking a closer look at curcumin, trying to discover how it works and in what ways it might be used to help various health problems. The result has been more than 2,800 research papers published about the effects of curcumin. Below are just a few:

Alzheimer's Disease - Research in animals has demonstrated that curcumin can support both prevention of changes in the brain that lead to Alzheimer's, and reversal of some of the damage already done.(2) A 2005 study done at UCLA found curcumin supported more effective outcomes than some of the drugs being tested for the prevention and treatment of Alzheimer's.(3)

Cancer - A great deal of research has been done on curcumin's anticarcinogenic properties. According to the American Cancer Society, "A growing body of laboratory research suggests the spice turmeric has potent anticancer activity - and researchers have launched a slew of human trials to find out just how powerful it may be."(4) Laboratory and animal studies suggest that curcumin may help the body prevent, control the spread of, or kill several types of cancer including breast, skin, colon and prostate cancers. It is also being tested vis-a-vis other cancers such as metastatic melanoma, mantle cell lymphoma, multiple myeloma and advanced pancreatic cancer.(5-13)

Cardiovascular Problems - It is thought that curcumin may be able to help the body prevent oxidation of cholesterol, which would protect the blood vessels from plaque build-up that can lead to heart attack or stroke. In one study, ten healthy participants took 500 mg of curcumin each day for seven days. At the end of the week, they had:

• A 33% decrease in the blood levels of oxidized cholesterol.

• An 11.63% decrease in total serum cholesterol.

• A 29% increase in HDL ('good') cholesterol.(14)

Diabetes - In studies of diabetic mice, those given curcumin experienced lower blood glucose levels and lost weight. The curcumin supplementation was also linked to significantly lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels.(15)

Multiple Sclerosis - Researchers think curcumin may support the body in fighting multiple sclerosis. Mice, specially bred to develop an MS-like illness called experimental autoimmune encephalomyelitis (EAS), were given either a 50 or 100 mcg dose of curcumin three times a week for 30 days. Controls received no curcumin. By day 15, the EAS had progressed in the mice that got no curcumin to the point that both hind legs were completely paralyzed. The mice given the 50 mcg dose showed only minor symptoms, and those given the 100 mcg dose seemed to be unimpaired throughout the study.(16)

Curcumin is widely recognized by medical researchers as being a powerful anti-inflammatory.

Based on the studies done thus far, curcumin shows great promise as an option for promoting healthy response to inflammation in a number of inflammatory illnesses such as:

• Osteoarthritis (17)

• Rheumatoid arthritis (18)

• Uveitis – an inflammation within the eye (19)

Recommended Dose

The recommended dose is 500 to 1000 mg (1-2 capsules) per day, or as directed by your healthcare professional. Clinical studies have shown it to be safe at much higher doses.

Possible Drug Interactions - Use during chemotherapy should only be performed under the direct supervision of a qualified medical professional. Curcumin may enhance the action of anti-platelet drugs, high doses of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or warfarin. Do not take if you have a biliary tract obstruction (gallstones, for example) or are taking a steroidal anti-inflammatory such as prednisone.

In Summary

With its potential ability to support healthy inflammatory response and antioxidant functions, curcumin may dish up a smorgasboard of health benefits.

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