

Turmeric

by Moses Goldberg, ND

Naturopathic Doctor licensed for primary care in California

I am often asked by patients, "If you had to take one herbal supplement, what would that be?" The herb I am most impressed with is Turmeric, or *Curcuma longa*. We think of Turmeric as the dark yellow/orange spice found in curries – but the healing potential has been used throughout history and proven through recent scientific studies to help prevent cancer growths, Alzheimer's, inflammation, and to help the liver work more effectively.

In Naturopathic Medicine, the organ that is most crucial to healing is the liver. The more we do to help the liver perform its functions, the greater the overall health of the patient. To cultivate a deeper awareness of healing, the focus on any treatment is to enhance the physiology of our patients and not just treat the disease state. The liver is ascribed to over 500 physiological effects and it's the only organ that can regenerate its own cells. Turmeric is an herb that greatly helps the liver to improve function. It has anti-oxidant properties that are able to protect against free-radicals toxins and minimize the damage done and encourages normalization of the tissues.

Let's look at some of the current research being done with this plant.

Alzheimer's Disease

A study at the National University in Singapore tested the brain power of more than a thousand Asian people aged between 60 and 93 using a standard test called the Mini Mental State Examination. Those who ate curry even just once every six months had better results than those who said they "never or rarely" ate it. Previous research has suggested that Turmeric inhibits the build-up of harmful protein deposits called amyloid plaques that occur in the brains of Alzheimer's patients. This research has been tested on animal subjects and showed about 43-50% reduction in those plaques. The researchers also noted that the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease is purportedly lower in India among the elderly than those in the US. This could be linked to the fact that Turmeric is widely consumed by people in India. Human trials are now in process. (*American Journal of Epidemiology*, DOI: 10.1093/aje/kwj267)

Breast and Prostate Cancer

Epidemiological studies have linked the frequent use of Turmeric to lower rates of breast, prostate, lung and colon cancer; laboratory experiments have shown Turmeric can prevent tumors from forming; and research conducted at the University of Texas suggests that even when breast cancer is already present, Turmeric can help slow the spread of breast cancer cells to the lungs in mice. (*Biochemical Pharmacology* September 2005) In other studies Turmeric has down-regulated the progression of cancer metastasis in Prostate cancer. (*Prostate*, 2004 Jun 15; 60(1):1-17<)

Rheumatoid Arthritis

American researchers found that a special Turmeric extract, composed largely of chemicals called curcuminoids, can prevent both acute and chronic rheumatoid arthritis. In experiments on rats, the Turmeric extract appeared to block inflammatory pathways associated with rheumatoid arthritis. (*Arthritis and Rheumatism* November 2006; 54(11): 3452-3464 (Turmeric)) Another study showed that Turmeric inhibits prostaglandin E(2) production (a strong pro-inflammatory process in our bodies) in synovial fibroblasts of patients with rheumatoid arthritis. (*Int J Mol Med.*, 2007 Sep;20(3):365-72)

The role of Turmeric has many applications in our health. More studies are now being applied to human trials and I expect to read some more fascinating health benefits from this plant ally. I would recommend meals of Curry (you can still have it very mild) at least monthly and take Turmeric – 2 capsules daily. You are helping your liver, your physiology, your immune system and most likely you will be able to finish that Sunday crossword puzzle.