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Can You Use Curcumin to Treat Cancer?



Medically reviewed by [Alan Carter, Pharm.D.](#) — Written by Annette McDermott — Updated on August 16, 2018

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Curcumin and cancer

Although traditional treatments are standard for all cancers, some people are also looking to complementary therapies for relief. For some, this means adding curcumin to their daily regimen.

Curcumin is the main active ingredient in the spice turmeric. Although turmeric is primarily a culinary spice, it's also used in traditional Indian medicine. Its extract, curcumin, is thought to have many health benefits. Researchers are investigating its potential to treat cancer and other conditions.

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What the research says

Curcumin has antioxidant properties that may help reduce inflammation in the body. Inflammation may lead to the development of cancer. There isn't enough evidence to say that curcumin definitively prevents or treats cancer. Some research on the subject

has been promising, though.

A [2009 study](#) found that curcumin can kill many types of cancer cells in multiple ways. Because more than one method is possible, cancer cells are less likely to become curcumin-resistant. Curcumin targets only cancer cells, leaving healthy cells unaffected. This is an important step in potential treatment because chemotherapy drugs kill both healthy cells and cancer cells.

A [2008 study](#) concluded that curcumin can help fight pancreatic cancer cells, but higher levels are needed. To address this problem, a highly bioavailable form of curcumin, called Theracurmin, was created. The widely available supplement is meant to deliver higher levels of curcumin to people with cancer without increased harm. More research is needed on people with pancreatic and other cancers to determine Theracurmin's effectiveness.

[Research](#) has also looked at turmeric, which contains curcumin, as a way of preventing cancer. According to the [Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center](#), rats exposed to cancer-causing substances and then treated with turmeric didn't develop stomach, colon, or skin cancers.

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Risks and warnings

Drug interactions

Some [evidence](#) suggests turmeric may interfere with chemotherapy drugs. This is particularly true of the drugs doxorubicin and cyclophosphamide. If you're undergoing chemotherapy, you should talk to your doctor before using turmeric or curcumin.

Turmeric can increase the amount of stomach acid in your body. So it may reduce the effectiveness of acid-reducing medications. This includes medication for acid reflux.

If you have diabetes and are taking medication to lower your blood sugar levels, turmeric can amplify the effects of your medication. Taking turmeric may cause your blood sugar to drop to a dangerously low level.

The spice can also amplify the effects of blood-thinning medications. This can increase your risk for bleeding.

Gastrointestinal

Most people can use turmeric as a culinary spice without having any side effects. However, consuming large amounts of the spice or its extract may cause you to have indigestion or an upset stomach. You may also feel nauseous or have gas.

Using turmeric for an extended period of time may cause ulcers. This is due to the increase in stomach acid.

Worsening of certain conditions

If you have gallstones or another bile-blocking condition, you should speak with your doctor before adding turmeric to your treatment plan. The spice may cause kidney stones, especially in people who are already at risk for kidney stones.

Turmeric may also affect medications, treatments, or conditions not listed here. Check

with your doctor and discuss any possible risks before adding it to your regimen.

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How to use curcumin

Turmeric is available in several forms, including:

- powder
- tea
- extracts
- capsules
- cut root

You could also skip the turmeric and just use curcumin supplements. Most people tolerate turmeric and curcumin well.

There aren't any officially recommended dosages for turmeric or curcumin. You should consult your doctor or a natural health practitioner for dosing recommendations. Both turmeric and curcumin aren't absorbed well unless taken with black pepper. When choosing turmeric or curcumin products, make sure the ingredient list includes black

pepper or piperine.

You should check with your doctor before giving turmeric or curcumin to children.

[Read more: Turmeric and other anti-inflammatory spices »](#)

What you can do now

Curcumin shows promise as an alternative treatment for cancer. Research is ongoing to determine how curcumin works to fight cancer, and the best way to use it as a treatment.

Until a verdict is reached, feel free to enjoy a cup of turmeric tea, add the spice to your morning smoothie, or eat more curry. Turmeric is a great spice to add to your natural remedy arsenal. Just make sure to consult your doctor before attempting to treat cancer or any other medical condition with curcumin.

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Last medically reviewed on May 3, 2016

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