

Curcumin

The spice
that can help

Inflammatory Bowel Disease



A report by Peter Jackson

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Introduction

Ever wondered why those who live in the Indian sub continent get less disease than we do in the west?

Research over the last 30 years is now proving what many had suspected for some time – the spices used in Indian cuisine are protective against disease.

There is one spice however that stands out above all others in terms of the interest it is getting by researchers around the world – that is Turmeric. More specifically it is the extract of Turmeric – Curcumin which makes up 4% of the spice - which is grabbing all the headlines.

A quick look on the internet will reveal the amazing extent of the research going on behind Turmeric (Curcumin). It appears to be protective against so many diseases, but it is the research that is showing its benefits for inflammatory bowel disease which is of particular interest to me. This is why I have written this report.

Curcumin and Inflammatory Bowel Disease

The anti-inflammatory effects of Curcumin have now been linked to benefits to inflammatory bowel conditions.

A study from the University of Reading in 2004 has demonstrated the ability of Curcumin to reduce the pain, discomfort and other symptoms associated with Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

Curcumin seems to have a soothing effect on sensitive bowels where loose and badly formed stools are prevalent. In the study, in a relatively short time, long-standing sufferers saw some remarkable effects on the symptoms that they had been plagued by for more than 10 years.

One current theory on IBS is that it is caused by low-grade inflammation of the gut lining.

Conventional treatment for inflammation of the bowels can quite often include NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) which may dampen down the symptoms in the short term, but in the longer term they can exacerbate the condition by inflaming and irritating the gut lining. In contrast Curcumin can reduce the inflammation without side effects but there is increasing evidence that Curcumin may also be helping to correct the underlying cause

Crohn's Disease

The University of New Mexico has published work this year in the American Journal of Physiology on the use of Curcumin for Crohn's Disease sufferers – an inflammatory bowel condition known to affect 20% of the UK population.

The condition is hall-marked by increased permeability of the gut lining- known to be caused by cells failing to sit neatly butted up against another. Inflamed bowels are one of the main causes of 'leaky gut.'

If you are a sufferer of Inflammatory Bowel Disease where the symptoms are loose bowels, you will know that what is required is a soothing solution.

Here's where Curcumin appears to fit the bill by down-regulating the production of the inflammatory compounds in the gut wall, (which ultimately lead to the leaky gut).

Curcumin may actually lead to both symptom improvement and maybe even a correction of the underlying cause.

Ulcerative Colitis

This is a similar yet distinct condition. If you are a sufferer of Ulcerative Colitis then you will know that it can plague you with a more dramatic array of symptoms – including regular sightings of blood and mucus in the stools along with a tendency towards a looser bowel habit.

The good news is that a research team from India has recently published their work in the British Journal of Pharmacology on the protective effects of Curcumin on an experimental model of colitis where significant effects were made on reducing symptoms.

Another study in China has found that the use of Curcumin in colitis made ulcers smaller, improved body weight recovery and reduced inflammation.

Another double blind, placebo controlled study has confirmed that Curcumin is a promising and safe substance for ulcerative colitis.

Curcumin has also been indicated for the treatment of dyspepsia, which is frequently a symptom of gallbladder disease. Curcumin is considered to be choleric and can stimulate the flow of bile.

Curcumin's general anti-inflammatory effects

The property that makes Curcumin so interesting is its anti-inflammatory effect in the body. As inflammation can be the precursor to disease, it is the natural anti-inflammatory effect that makes this natural spice so interesting. This means it also has benefits for other inflammatory conditions in the body over and above inflammatory bowel diseases.

Arthritis benefits and effects on joints

Another condition that can benefit from the anti-inflammatory effects of Curcumin is arthritis.

Benefits were first noted in 1980 and numerous studies have investigated this effect further. A study at the University of Arizona published in 2006 showed that Curcumin inhibited joint inflammation and destruction.

In addition, a low dose curcumin complex has been found to relieve pain and increase mobility in patients with osteoarthritis according to a new study from Italy.

Pain management

Curcumin's unique properties can also help reduce pain.

Inflammation is a response to trauma and this results in blood vessel engorgement. This in turn causes leakage of fluid which causes the area of the trauma to swell, putting pressure on sensory nerves and causing pain.

If inflammation is not reduced, the pain will persist and you now have chronic pain. That includes chronic arthritis, chronic back pain, menstrual pain, headaches and post surgery pain.

It has long been known that to control pain, you must control inflammation. This is where Curcumin comes in - it's powerful anti inflammatory action has a direct effect on pain and the fantastic thing is that it has no recorded side effects.

The first studies of the anti-inflammatory effects were investigated in the early 1970's and many of the specific effects of Curcumin have been linked back to this ability to reduce inflammation whether it is in the digestive tract or anywhere else in the body including the joints.

The growing realisation that cancer can result from inflammation has spurred mounting interest in Curcumin as an anti-cancer agent as well.

The prevalence of the four top cancers in the US – colon, breast, prostate and lung – are ten times lower in India.

As a result of all this, the anti-oxidant, anti-inflammatory and anti-carcinogenic properties of Curcumin are undergoing intense research around the world.

One of the major centres for this research is the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Centre. It is clear that Turmeric is one of the natural plants of the moment

The background to Curcumin

Curcumin is a 4% extract of the spice Turmeric which is widely used in Indian food. It gives curries it's yellow colour.

Turmeric is native to India and South East Asia and has been used traditionally in Ayurvedic medicine for many hundreds of years. It was customarily used for swelling, wound healing and digestive disorders.

Ayurveda is a holistic system of medicine and is indigenous to and widely practiced in India. It has a meaning of 'the science of life.' It is a system that has been practiced in daily life in India for more than 5000 years.

Turmeric is ground from the root of the *Curcuma longa* plant and it is a member of the ginger family.

In research years, much has been published in the scientific literature on Curcumin which is seen as the part of Turmeric that contains the anti-inflammatory properties. As a result of this, in recent years, its popularity amongst natural practitioners has soared.

A quick look on the internet will reveal the amazing extent of the research going on behind Turmeric (Curcumin) all over the world. It appears to be protective against so many diseases – it really is living proof that food is your medicine.

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