

## **CURCUMIN/TURMERIC?**

Compiled by Charles (Chuck) Maack – Prostate Cancer Patient/Activist/Mentor

**DISCLAIMER:** Please recognize that I am not a Medical Doctor. I have been an avid student researching and studying prostate cancer as a survivor and continuing patient since 1992. I have dedicated my retirement years to continued research and study in order to serve as an advocate for prostate cancer awareness, and, from a activist patient's viewpoint, to voluntarily help patients, caregivers, and others interested develop an understanding of prostate cancer, its treatment options, and the treatment of the side effects that often accompany treatment. There is absolutely no charge for my mentoring – I provide this free service as one who has been there and hoping to make your journey one with better understanding and knowledge than was available to me when I was diagnosed so many years ago. Readers of this paper must understand that the comments or recommendations I make are not intended to be the procedure to blindly follow; rather, they are to be reviewed as my opinion, then used for further personal research, study, and subsequent discussion with the medical professional/physician providing your prostate cancer care.

I am aware many take Curcumin for varying ailments. The problem with taking curcumin for its antioxidant properties, is that unless encapsulated, digestive juice in the gastrointestinal tract quickly destroys curcumin so that little actually gets into the blood.

Well known Medical Oncologist and specialist particularly in the treatment of recurring and advanced prostate cancer Charles “Snuffy” Myers has this to say:

“I think the biology and biochemistry of curcumin is very interesting - promising. However, I can find no human clinical trials. I would really like to see that. Also, I would not take it with chemotherapy. Curcumin blocks a protein, called jun kinase, that is part of how chemotherapy kills some cancer cells. There are some very nice papers on curcumin blocking the action of chemotherapy against breast cancer - in vitro! We saw the same thing with curcumin and prostate cancer cell death triggered by jun kinase.”

However, the jury may still be out in the use of Curcumin/Curcuminoids with chemotherapy as noted in this more recent Phase II trial

“ASCO: Adding Curcuminoids to Docetaxel Shows Promise in Castration-Resistant Prostate Cancer.” <http://tinyurl.com/jg24453>

Yet conclusions in this paper indicate though there appears some promise, there is no absolute certainty. The interest now is what a phase III trial may conclude.

Thus, caution is necessary.

Curcumin was recently evaluated to accompany radiotherapy: Evaluating the effect of curcumin supplementation on oxidative status of patients with prostate cancer who undergo radiotherapy.

<http://tinyurl.com/zcckclm>

“PSA levels were reduced to below 0.2 ng/ml in both (**My Note: curcumin and placebo**) groups, 3 mo after treatment, however, no significant differences were observed between the 2 groups regarding treatment outcomes.”

My understanding of take home message... apparently including the antioxidant curcumin had no adverse effect by including with radiotherapy, but also had no better effect on outcome than those patients who were not prescribed curcumin.

Important to also be aware are the following from Natural Standard and Harvard Medical School:

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)

*Be aware that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration does not strictly regulate herbs and dietary supplements. There is no guarantee of strength, purity or safety of products containing or claiming to contain turmeric. Decisions to use herbs or supplements should be carefully considered. Individuals using prescription drugs should discuss taking herbs or supplements with their pharmacist or health care provider before starting.*

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## Evidence

Scientists have studied turmeric for the following health problems:

<b>Antioxidant</b>
Some research suggests that as an antioxidant, turmeric may help in the prevention of conditions such as cancer and heart disease. These studies, however, are small and of poor quality, and most have involved animals. Better studies performed in humans are needed to provide more definitive answers.
<b>Cancer</b>
Several laboratory studies, animal studies and low-quality studies in humans have examined the effects of turmeric on different types of tumors. However, currently it is not clear if turmeric is effective in the prevention or treatment of cancer. There are several ongoing studies in this area.
<b>Heartburn and stomach ulcers</b>
Turmeric has been used traditionally for stomach and intestinal conditions. There is limited study in this area, and the effects of turmeric are not clear. Turmeric may actually cause heartburn or ulcers when used long-term or in high doses.
<b>Arthritis treatment</b>
A few small studies suggest turmeric may help improve the symptoms of osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. However, larger studies are needed to determine the exact benefit of turmeric for these conditions.
<b>Other</b>
Turmeric has been studied for the treatment of high cholesterol, inflammation, scabies, viral infections, HIV, AIDS and a vision disorder called chronic anterior uveitis. Other studies suggest that turmeric may prevent gallstones and the formation of blood clots and may have a protective effect on the liver. Turmeric has not

been proven for any of these uses, and more research is needed before turmeric can be recommended for these conditions.

### Unproven Uses

*Turmeric has been suggested for many other uses, based on tradition or on scientific theories. However, these uses have not been thoroughly studied in humans, and there is limited scientific evidence about safety or effectiveness. Some of these suggested uses are for conditions that are potentially serious and even life-threatening. You should consult a health care provider before using turmeric for any unproven use.*

Alzheimer's disease	Human papillomavirus
Antifertility agent	Insect bites
Anti-inflammatory	Insect repellent
Antimicrobial	Jaundice
Appetite stimulant	Kidney stones
Asthma	Lack of menstrual period
Bile flow	Leprosy
Bleeding	Liver protection
Boils	Menstrual cramps
Bruise	Multidrug resistance
Cataracts	Neurodegenerative disorders
Cervical cancer	Ovarian cancer
Colic	Pain
Cough	Prostate cancer
Cystic fibrosis	Protozoal infections
Decreased breast milk	Ringworm
Diabetes	Scarring
Diarrhea	Scleroderma
Dizziness	Seizures
Flatulence	Snake venom
Fungal infections	Spasms
Gastric cancer	Sperm count
Gonorrhea	Sperm motility
Hepatitis	Stomach bloating
High blood pressure	

### Potential Dangers

Allergies

Individuals who are allergic to spices that include turmeric or to yellow food colorings should avoid turmeric. Contact allergy to curcumin has been reported. Turmeric is a member of the ginger (*Zingiberaceae*) family and should be avoided by people with allergies to these plants.

### Side Effects

Few side effects have been reported when turmeric is used at recommended doses. There are reports of skin rash and mild dizziness. Stomach irritation, including heartburn and ulcers, may occur with long-term use. In animal studies, turmeric has caused hair loss, changes in blood pressure and liver damage. In theory, turmeric may increase the risk of bleeding. You may need to stop taking turmeric before some surgeries; discuss this with your health care provider.

Individuals with gallstones, blocked bile ducts, stomach or intestinal ulcers, high levels of stomach acid or immune system diseases should speak with a health care provider before using turmeric in amounts greater than commonly found in foods.

### Pregnancy And Breast-Feeding

Turmeric cannot be recommended during pregnancy or breast-feeding in amounts greater than usually found in foods. Turmeric may stimulate contractions of the uterus and may alter menstrual periods.

### Interactions

*Interactions with drugs, supplements and other herbs have not been thoroughly studied. The interactions listed below have been reported in scientific publications. If you are taking prescription drugs, speak with your health care provider or pharmacist before using herbs or dietary supplements.*

### Interactions With Drugs

In theory, turmeric may increase the risk of bleeding when used with anticoagulants (blood thinners) or antiplatelet drugs. Examples include warfarin (Coumadin), heparin and clopidogrel (Plavix). Some pain relievers may also increase the risk of bleeding if used with turmeric. Examples include aspirin, ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil) and naproxen (Naprosyn, Aleve, Anaprox). There is evidence that turmeric may interfere with the way the liver breaks down certain drugs. As a result, turmeric may cause the levels of drugs in the body to be too

high, leading to serious side effects. Based on animal data, turmeric may lower blood sugar and may have additive effects when used with diabetes medications.

When taken with indomethacin or reserpine, turmeric may help reduce the number of stomach and intestinal ulcers normally caused by these drugs. However, when taken in larger doses or when used for long periods of time, turmeric itself can cause ulcers. Studies have shown that turmeric may decrease cholesterol levels. If you are taking prescription drugs, ask your health care provider or pharmacist for advice before you take turmeric.

### Interactions With Herbs And Dietary Supplements

In theory, turmeric may increase the risk of bleeding when taken with other products that are also believed to increase the risk of bleeding. Examples include [\*Ginkgo biloba\*](#) and garlic (*Allium sativum*). In theory, turmeric may increase the blood levels of herbs processed by the liver, such as chasteberry (*Vitex agnus-castus*). In theory, turmeric may excessively lower cholesterol levels in the blood if also taken with herbs and supplements that lower cholesterol levels, such as [red yeast](#). Based on animal data, turmeric may lower blood sugar and may have additive effects when used with diabetes medications. Check with your health care provider before starting turmeric if you are taking other herbs or supplements.

### Dosing

*The doses listed below are based on scientific research, publications or traditional use. Because most herbs and supplements have not been thoroughly studied or monitored, safety and effectiveness may not be proven. Brands may be made differently, with variable ingredients even within the same brand. Combination products often contain small amounts of each ingredient and may not be effective. Appropriate dosing should be discussed with a health care provider before starting therapy; always read the recommendations on a product's label. The dosing for unproven uses should be approached cautiously, because scientific information is limited in these areas.*

Turmeric may be standardized to contain 95 percent curcuminoids per dose.

### **Adults (Aged 18 Or Older)**

*Tablets:* A dose of 1,500 milligrams (1.5 grams) per day has been taken by mouth. It may be taken as three 500-milligram doses. Patients with colorectal cancer

ingested curcumin capsules (3,600, 1,800, or 450 milligrams daily) for seven days in one study.

*Turmeric oil:* A dose of 0.6 milliliters of turmeric oil has been taken three times a day for one month, and a dose of 1 milliliter in three divided doses has been taken for two months.

### **Children (Younger Than 18)**

The dosing and safety of turmeric have not been studied thoroughly in children, and it is recommended that you discuss doses with your child's health care provider before starting therapy. The amount of turmeric usually found in foods is assumed to be safe.

### **Summary**

Although turmeric has been suggested for many conditions, it has not been proven effective for the treatment of any health problem. Pregnant or breast-feeding women, individuals with gallstones, individuals with blocked bile ducts and those allergic to yellow food colorings should avoid turmeric. People with stomach or intestinal ulcers should not use turmeric in high doses or for extended periods of time. If you are taking prescription or over-the-counter drugs, speak with your health care provider and pharmacist before starting turmeric in doses higher than found in foods. Consult your health care provider immediately if you experience side effects.

*The information in this monograph was prepared by the professional staff at Natural Standard, based on thorough systematic review of scientific evidence. The material was reviewed by the Faculty of the Harvard Medical School with final editing approved by Natural Standard.*