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Q Curcumin or Turmeric?

I'm confused about curcumin and turmeric. I have the impression that curcumin, not turmeric, has been studied and that you can't cook with curcumin, but you can get it as a supplement that costs about the same as turmeric supplements. If you're going to supplement, which do you recommend, turmeric or curcumin? And why?



A Answer (Published 4/28/2011)

In addition to its use as a culinary spice, turmeric has been used traditionally in India as a disinfectant and treatment for laryngitis, bronchitis, and diabetes. Turmeric is derived from the rhizomes (underground stems) of the plant *Curcuma longa*, a member of the ginger family. It is responsible for the yellow color of Indian curry and American mustard. Curcumin, which has powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, is the most active constituent of turmeric.

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Population studies have shown that elderly villagers in India appear to have the lowest rate of [Alzheimer's disease](#) in the world, and researchers have speculated that the anti-inflammatory effects of curcumin may be partly responsible. (Alzheimer's begins as an inflammatory process in the brain, and Indians eat turmeric with almost every meal). So far, however, I've seen no evidence of benefit from curcumin supplementation in Alzheimer's patients.

Other studies of turmeric and curcumin have shown the following benefits:

- Turmeric extract worked as well as a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug for treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee in a study published in the August 2009 issue of the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*.
- Laboratory studies suggest that curcumin acts as a weak phytoestrogen and seems to have cancer protective effects.
- Lab studies have also shown that curcumin induces programmed death of colon cancer cells, and clinical trials are investigating the use of curcumin in treatment of colon cancer.
- Curcumin suppresses microinflammation in the GI tract associated with inflammatory bowel disease.

I frequently recommend turmeric supplements, and I believe whole turmeric is more effective than isolated curcumin for inflammatory disorders, including arthritis, tendonitis, and [autoimmune conditions](#). Take 400 to 600 milligrams of turmeric extracts (available in tablets or capsules) three times per day or as directed on the product label. Look for products standardized for 95% curcuminoids. Neither curcumin nor turmeric taken orally is well absorbed unless taken with black pepper or piperine, a constituent of black pepper responsible for its pungency. When shopping for supplements, make sure that the one you choose contains black pepper extract or piperine. (If you're cooking with turmeric, be sure to add some black pepper to the food.) Be patient when taking turmeric supplements: the full benefits may not be apparent for eight weeks.

Don't use turmeric if you have gallstones or bile duct dysfunction. Pregnant women shouldn't use it without their doctors' approval. In rare cases, extended use can cause stomach upset or heartburn. (Note that piperine can slow the elimination of some prescription drugs including phenytoin [Dilantin], propranolol [Inderal], and theophylline. Some evidence also suggests that curcumin can interfere with a chemotherapy agent used to treat

breast cancer, so if you're being treated for this disease, be sure to discuss the advisability of taking curcumin with your physician.

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Learn more: [Turmeric Health Benefits](#) (my recent article on the Huffington Post).



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