

Curcumin vs. Memory Loss

by L. Stephen Coles, M.D., Ph.D.

Curcumin could well be the most exciting news today when it comes to prevention of cognitive loss.

Recent research on Alzheimer's Disease brings to light more and more of the powerful benefits to expect from curcumin. Curcumin is the bright orange phytonutrient-rich extract of the cooking spice, turmeric, which has been used for thousands of years in curries and other dishes in India. Many public health and nutritional experts have begun to call curcumin "the most important medical herb today." I agree.

Curcumin could well be the most exciting news today when it comes to prevention of cognitive loss associated with Alzheimer's disease. Unfortunately, it is not a cure, but it can play a huge role with both prevention of the disease and maintaining brain function.

In India, where curcumin (as a part of turmeric) is so much part of the diet, Alzheimer's disease hardly exists, with rates at one percent or less. The number of sufferers is tenfold greater (that's 1,000 percent!) in the United States—and growing. Curcumin is definitely part of my daily health program, which also involves staying mentally active.

UCLA scientists and colleagues from UC Riverside and the Human BioMolecular Research Institute have found that curcumin, together with vitamin D₃, may help stimulate the immune system to clear the brain of beta amyloid, which forms the plaques considered the hallmark of Alzheimer's disease. The early research findings, which appear in the July 2009 *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* (17;3:703-17), may lead to

new approaches in preventing and treating Alzheimer's by utilizing vitamin D₃—a form of vitamin D—both alone and together with curcumin, to boost the immune system in protecting the brain against plaque build-up. This is very important because this build-up of beta amyloid plaque can decrease brain function. Vitamin D₃ is an essential nutrient for immune system health. We call it the "sunshine vitamin" because our body makes it when our skin is exposed to sunshine. Doctors are finding that many people do not get enough vitamin

D. Deficiencies may occur during winter months or in those who spend a lot of time indoors, such as Alzheimer's patients.

"We hope that vitamin D₃ and curcumin, both naturally occurring nutrients, may offer new preventive and treatment possibilities for Alzheimer's disease," said Dr. Milan Fiala, study author and a researcher at the David Geffen School of Medicine and the Veterans Affairs Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System. "Since vitamin D and curcumin work differently with the immune system, we may find that a combination of the two or each used alone may be more effective—depending on the individual patient," the scientist said.

These findings are timely. As someone who studies supercentenarians, the oldest people on earth, I recognize that Alzheimer's rates are increasing, and one of the biggest detriments to healthy aging. By 2010, nearly 36 million people globally will have the condition. The National Institutes of Health says that one in seven Americans over the age of 71 will have some sort of dementia. Aside from Alzheimer's prevention, curcumin is a potent anti-inflammatory and a hugely beneficial antioxidant, as well as one of the most effective natural pain killers I have ever seen. Therefore, I now almost universally recommend curcumin supplements on a daily basis to all my patients—and my friends and family, too.

The biggest issue, however, with curcumin is that it is poorly absorbed. From UCLA to the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Texas, researchers are calling for a more highly absorbable form of curcumin as the best way to super-charge its benefits.

I have discovered BCM-95® (also known as CRX 791), a micronized phospholipid turmeric preparation that has up to tenfold greater absorbability and bioavailability than other curcumin products—even those with special ingredients to help absorption. This was shown in the July-August 2008 issue of the *Indian Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences* (70;4:445-49).

This is a huge breakthrough, and represents a very positive step forward in realizing the potential of curcumin. It means that no smart shopper will simply buy a curcumin supplement anymore. I also want you to eat more curries and dishes with turmeric as a cooking spice. However, I know that many people either through taste or habit won't be able to eat enough turmeric. That's why it is good to know that this new BCM-95 form of curcumin can get into your bloodstream and cells in a way that others can't, to offer the most benefit and help. ■



Resources

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Dr. Coles is a visiting scholar at UCLA and is the world's leading researcher into supercentenarians (the longest-lived people on earth).