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AYURVEDA

## The Yellow Miracle Root

Turmeric is a low-cost cure for what ails you

Think "natural healing," and you likely conjure an image of rare herbal extracts with exotic names. But don't underestimate the curative powers of common spices. Case in point: turmeric. Just consider the unassuming yellow root's magical effect on wounds. Ayurvedic doctor Virendra Sodhi told Hinduism Today: "I had a bad bicycle accident some time ago. Falling from my bike on a downhill trail, I badly scraped my skin from elbow to shoulder. I applied turmeric and ghee paste to the wound, and it healed completely in ten days. I don't even have a scar to show from it."

Turmeric is gaining ground in the American health market. An ad from the Indiana Botanic Gardens hypes, "Joint pain? Try for relief with ....Turmeric! Discover for yourself the amazing health benefits of this inexpensive, common spice." Against arthritis and other tissue inflammatory illnesses, the ad correctly explains, turmeric is as effective as hydrocortisone, and with none of the drug's side-effects.

Western researchers are rediscovering properties already familiar to Ayurveda: age-abating antioxidant, digestive

enhancer, liver protector, blood purifier, antiseptic, anti-swelling, cholesterol buster, skin toner and anti-cancerous. More uses are being discovered as researchers experiment with curcuminoids, turmeric's active chemical ingredient.

Two eager researchers were so enamored with the spice that they applied for and received in 1995 an exclusive US patent for its use on wounds. Thanks to a protest by the Indian government's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the patent was thrown out last August on the grounds of "prior art" or existing public knowledge.

Haridra in Sanskrit, *Curcuma longa* botanically, turmeric is a small plant closely related to ginger. Its bright yellow, ginger-like roots are ground into a paste or powder. It is used in cuisines as varied as Indian and Italian. The plant is sacred to Hindus, indigenous to India and an essential part of its society. In temples, turmeric water is used daily in ritual ablution of the Deities. The powder mixed with unpolished rice is an important offering during puja.

Kumkuma (literally "red-red"), that distinctive forehead mark of pious Hindus, is turmeric turned red by mixing with lime. It is common practice among women to apply turmeric paste before a bath to cleanse and revitalize the skin. At home, turmeric is used in many recipes for flavor and as a preservative in making pickles.

"E. Coli or Salmonella bacteria don't stand a chance against

even a pinch of turmeric," says Dr. Sodhi. At his clinic in Bellevue, Washington, he liberally prescribes turmeric to treat a kaleidoscope of problems, from heartburn, liver and kidney disorders to surgical trauma, not to mention arthritis. "It is my favorite herb. The only other herb that comes close to turmeric's wide reaching capabilities is ginger. Also, there are no side effects." A medicinal dose is a teaspoon a day with each meal.

More research on turmeric's power is underway, including its effect on cancer. Dr. Sodhi said a study in India linked the low rate of cancer among Indians to their use of turmeric. He recommends that turmeric be used raw to treat ailments. If cooked or heated, it loses its effectiveness.

The <sup>us</sup>\$3 per pound kitchen spice is just as effective as the far more costly 500 milligram tablets (at \$90 a pound) or the even more expensive standardized extracts of curcumin. [1](#)