

## Turmeric vs Alzheimer's Disease

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*A pilot study performed with people affected by Alzheimer's disease found that consumption of the Indian spice turmeric greatly ameliorated the symptoms of this disease.*

**Turmeric** is a spice derived from grinding the dried roots of *Curcuma longa*, a plant in the ginger family (*Zingerberaceae*). Commonly used in Indian cuisine, turmeric contains large quantities of curcumin, the pigment responsible for the flavour and the bright yellow colour which are characteristic of this spice.

Beyond its culinary use, for thousands of years turmeric has played a leading role in traditional Indian medicine, where it is used to treat a very wide variety of ailments, such as digestive troubles, fever, infections and arthritis.

Thanks to the tools of modern science, we now know that the therapeutic power of turmeric is due to the numerous pharmacological activities of the curcumin it contains, including antioxidant, antithrombotic and anticancerous properties.

All of these characteristics make curcumin one of the most exceptional components of the human diet, a "spice medication" possessing strong potential for preventing and treating many diseases.



Aside from its role in preventing disease, regular consumption of turmeric improved the quality of life for patients with Alzheimer's disease.

### AGAINST ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

The research studies performed over the past few years were, above all, directed at the strong anticancer properties of turmeric, but several studies also demonstrated that the curcumin present in this spice also possesses the property of preventing the formation of the amyloid plaques (senile

plaques) involved in the development of Alzheimer's disease.

This property is very interesting and could partially explain why India, the country which consumes the largest quantities of turmeric, is the world region where the prevalence of Alzheimer's disease is lowest<sup>(1)</sup>. But, more than simply have preventative potential, can turmeric also be useful for treating patients who already suffer from this disease?

### IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE

To answer this question, a team of Japanese scientists undertook a pilot study of a group of patients, aged 79 to 84, who were seriously affected by Alzheimer's disease. These patients presented all of the behavioural and psychological symptoms associated with this disease, notably severe irritability, agitation, anxiety and apathy as well as problems of urinary incontinence. In addition to the loss of cognitive function, these symptoms are a terrible effect of the disease because they severely diminished the quality of life for the patients as well as for family members and nursing staff.

For twelve months, the scientists performed daily administration of a supplement containing 764 mg of turmeric (100 mg of curcumin) and regularly measured the evolution of the behavioural and psychological symptoms associated with Alzheimer's disease by using established neuropsychiatric tests (NPI-Q). After just three months of treatment, a remarkable decrease was observed in several symptoms: the patients were less agitated and irritable and decreases in hallucination, anxiety and depression were also seen<sup>(2)</sup>. Over the longer term (12 months), the turmeric treatment seemed to also cause amelioration in cognitive functions, as the patients began to recognize family members.

Alzheimer's disease is difficult to accept, because it represents a direct attack on our most intimate being and our dignity. To this end, if these results are confirmed by studies with much larger numbers of patients, the remarkable improvement in the quality of life seen in Alzheimer's patients treated with turmeric supplements could represent an important step in establishing treatments which will reduce the burden imposed by this disease on these patients and their close ones.

<sup>(1)</sup> Chandra, V et al. Incidence of Alzheimer's disease in a rural community in India: The Indo-US study. *Neurology* 2001; 57:985-989.

<sup>(2)</sup> Hishikawa N et al. Effects of turmeric on Alzheimer's disease with behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia. *Ayu*, 2012; 33:499-504.