

# herbs at a glance

## Turmeric



© Steven Foster

This fact sheet provides basic information about turmeric—common names, what the science says, potential side effects and cautions, and resources for more information.

**Common Names**—turmeric, turmeric root, Indian saffron

**Latin Name**—*Curcuma longa*

Turmeric, a shrub related to ginger, is grown throughout India, other parts of Asia, and Africa. Known for its warm, bitter taste and golden color, turmeric is commonly used in fabric dyes and foods such as curry powders, mustards, and cheeses. It should not be confused with Javanese turmeric.

In traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurvedic medicine, turmeric has been used to aid digestion and liver function, relieve arthritis pain, and regulate menstruation. Historically, turmeric has also been applied directly to the skin for eczema and wound healing. Today, traditional or folk uses of turmeric include heartburn, stomach ulcers, gallstones, inflammation, and cancer.

Turmeric's finger-like underground stems (rhizomes) are dried and taken by mouth as a powder or in capsules, teas, or liquid extracts. Turmeric can also be made into a paste and used on the skin.

### What the Science Says

- There is little reliable evidence to support the use of turmeric for any health condition because few clinical trials have been conducted.
- Preliminary findings from animal and other laboratory studies suggest that a chemical found in turmeric—called curcumin—may have anti-inflammatory, anticancer, and antioxidant properties, but these findings have not been confirmed in people.
- NCCAM-funded investigators have studied the active chemicals in turmeric and their effects—particularly anti-inflammatory effects—in human cells to better understand how turmeric might be used for health purposes. NCCAM is also funding basic research studies on the potential role of turmeric in preventing acute respiratory distress syndrome, liver cancer, and post-menopausal osteoporosis.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
AND HUMAN SERVICES  
National Institutes of Health  
National Center for Complementary  
and Alternative Medicine



NCCAM

## Side Effects and Cautions

- Turmeric is considered safe for most adults.
- High doses or long-term use of turmeric may cause indigestion, nausea, or diarrhea.
- In animals, high doses of turmeric have caused liver problems. No cases of liver problems have been reported in people.
- People with gallbladder disease should avoid using turmeric as a dietary supplement, as it may worsen the condition.
- Tell all your health care providers about any complementary health practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care. For tips about talking with your health care providers about complementary and alternative medicine, see NCCAM's Time to Talk campaign at [nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/](http://nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk/).

## Sources

Turmeric. Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database Web site. Accessed at [www.naturaldatabase.com](http://www.naturaldatabase.com) on July 22, 2009.

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa* Linn.) and curcumin. Natural Standard Database Web site. Accessed at [www.naturalstandard.com](http://www.naturalstandard.com) on July 22, 2009.

Turmeric root. In: Blumenthal M, Goldberg A, Brinckman J, eds. Herbal Medicine: Expanded Commission E Monographs. Newton, MA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2000:379-384.

## For More Information

Visit the NCCAM Web site at [nccam.nih.gov](http://nccam.nih.gov) and view Using Dietary Supplements Wisely ([nccam.nih.gov/health/supplements/wiseuse.htm](http://nccam.nih.gov/health/supplements/wiseuse.htm)).

## NCCAM Clearinghouse

Toll-free in the U.S.: 1-888-644-6226

TTY (for deaf and hard-of-hearing callers): 1-866-464-3615

E-mail: [info@nccam.nih.gov](mailto:info@nccam.nih.gov)

## PubMed®

Web site: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sites/entrez)

## NIH Office of Dietary Supplements

Web site: [www.ods.od.nih.gov](http://www.ods.od.nih.gov)

## NIH National Library of Medicine's MedlinePlus

Turmeric Listing: [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/662.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginfo/natural/662.html)

This publication is not copyrighted and is in the public domain. Duplication is encouraged.

NCCAM has provided this material for your information. It is not intended to substitute for the medical expertise and advice of your primary health care provider. We encourage you to discuss any decisions about treatment or care with your health care provider. The mention of any product, service, or therapy is not an endorsement by NCCAM.

National Institutes of Health



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services