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## HEALTH NEWS

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### Certain curry spices may help relieve symptoms of cystic fibrosis: study

By Joanne Yap, TODAY | Posted: 19 December 2006 1434 hrs

There will probably be more reason in future to quote the adage, "sugar, spice and all things nice". The humble curcumin, an ingredient that's commonly found in spices such as turmeric and used in cooking curry, has been found to reduce symptoms of cystic fibrosis in initial studies done on mice.

According to Dr Angeline Lai, head and consultant, genetics service at the Department of Paediatrics, KK Women's and Children's Hospital: "Cystic fibrosis is a genetic disorder caused by gene mutation. It is inherited. If both parents are carriers, the chances that their children will inherit a double dose of the gene mutation is one in four."

The disease affects a person's lungs and other organs, disrupting breathing and digestion. There is no known cure and it significantly shortens a person's lifespan. Most sufferers live until their 30s while some survive to their 40s. In Singapore, about 480 people have the condition.

In cystic fibrosis, the normal movement of salt in and out of certain cells in the body (such as those in the pancreas and lungs) are affected, causing thick and sticky mucus to form. The mucus clogs the lungs, making it difficult to breathe and encourages bacterial growth that leads to infections. Frequent infections damage the lungs, leading to an early death.

Digestive problems may also arise as the thick fluids may clog the ducts that lead from the pancreas to the small intestine.

Research is still ongoing to determine if the same effect takes place in humans, but scientists in the study, which was conducted in the United States, have found that curcumin acts helps to balance cellular salt content, thus preventing the onset of cystic fibrosis.

Nutrition consultant Louisa Zhang said turmeric has long been used in India for culinary and medicinal purposes.

"Curcumin, the phytonutrient (plant nutrient) identified by the researchers, has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. In cystic fibrosis, there is inflammation in the lungs and pancreas so the anti-inflammatory properties of curcumin may be useful in reducing the inflammation."

She pointed out that the study's findings are merely the beginning and more research needs to be done, and advises patients not to start plying themselves with turmeric supplements for the time being.

And certain groups, such as children, pregnant mothers and elderly people, should avoid taking such supplements as it is also likely to be present in our diets.

Ms Zhang said: "Asian cooking has always used turmeric, so there is no need for supplements."

Ms Christine Ong, chief dietician at the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, KK Women's and Children's Hospital, said diet does not play all that big a part in preventing the onset of the condition.

"Cystic fibrosis is a genetic condition and cannot be prevented by diet, medication or lifestyle. However, the progression of health problems can be slowed by eating nutritious, high-energy foods, not smoking, taking appropriate medication, and following their treatment plans." - TODAY/ra



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