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Curry spice may help arthritis

30th October 2006

By Sarah Routledge

Turmeric, a spice often used in curries, may have an anti-inflammatory mechanism similar to anti-arthritic pharmaceuticals currently under development.

Researchers at the University of Arizona had already shown in an earlier study that turmeric can prevent joint inflammation in rats. In the current study, they expanded their research to compare the chemical composition of an experimental turmeric extract with those of commercially available over the counter turmeric dietary supplements. Turmeric has been used for centuries in Asian medicine to treat inflammatory disorders and its extract can be found in western dietary supplements.

Initial results showed that a version of turmeric extract that was free of essential oils had a significant impact on arthritis and most closely matched the composition of commercially available supplements. This version was used in subsequent experiments and was shown to prevent acute and chronic arthritis, even when it was administered after arthritis had been induced.

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In addition, turmeric significantly inhibited joint destruction due to arthritis, and inhibited NF-KB, a protein that controls the gene expression of substances that produce an inflammatory response. The scientists said that "it would appear that turmeric dietary supplements share the same mechanism of action as antiarthritic pharmaceuticals currently under development that target NF-KB."

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The authors concluded that before turmeric supplements can be recommended for medicinal use, clinical trials are clearly needed to determine whether treatment with adequate doses of well-characterized turmeric extracts can indeed prevent or suppress disease flares in rheumatoid arthritis patients.

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