

Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)

Common Names: Curcuma, gauri, haldi, Indian saffron, you jin.

Location: Turmeric is a perennial plant found in India and throughout southern and eastern Asia.

Description: It grows to a height of three feet and bears pairs of lance-shaped leaves on alternate sides of the stem, which sprouts from a knobbed rhizome.

Properties: The root of the plant is used both as a spice and as a medicine. Turmeric is an essential flavoring spice of Indian curries and other cuisine.

Uses: Turmeric is a very important herb in ayurvedic medicine. A symbol of prosperity, it was considered a cleansing herb for the whole body. Practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine use turmeric to treat liver and gallbladder problems, stop bleeding, and ease chest congestion and menstrual discomforts. Turmeric is the primary anti-inflammatory herb of ayurvedic medicine. Its principal chemical component, curcumin, fights viral infection, cancer, and arthritis through its potent antioxidant action. Curcumin also protects the liver, stimulates the gallbladder, and scavenges free radicals. Curcumin is an excellent herbal remedy for situations in which high concentrations of antioxidants are required. The whole herb turmeric contains lower concentrations of curcumin, and is used when healing requires the application of volatile oils. Benefits of turmeric for specific health conditions include treatment of the following: arthritis, eczema, endometriosis, pain, tendonitis, atherosclerosis, bursitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, cancer, cataracts, cirrhosis of the liver, gallstones, halitosis, periodontal disease, heart attack, HIV/AIDS, and indigestion.

Doses: Turmeric is available as a powder and a tincture. It can also be made into a poultice. Curcumin, the antioxidant component of turmeric, is available in capsules and tablets. Be sure to note whether turmeric or curcumin is the form recommended for your condition. Unfortunately, curcumin is not absorbed well by the body. It is often sold in combination with bromelain to enhance absorption. Bromelain has some anti-inflammatory benefits of its own that may add to those of curcumin.

Warnings: People with congestive heart disease whose cause remains unidentified should avoid curcumin. There is evidence that heart disease can result from the overactivity of a gene called p52 and therefore may indirectly contribute to the destruction of healthy heart tissue. Turmeric should not be used for long periods of time, because it can cause stomach distress. It is not recommended for people with painful gallstones, obstructive jaundice, acute bilious colic, or extremely toxic liver disorders. If you are pregnant, consult your healthcare professional before using turmeric. One study in laboratory animals indicated that the use of turmeric reduced fertility. If you are trying to conceive or if you have a history of fertility problems, consult your practitioner before using turmeric. Turmeric is thought to inhibit blood-clotting effect. If you have a blood-clotting disorder, you should consult with your healthcare professional before using this herb.