

In the news

CURCUMIN CURRIES FAVOUR?

Curcumin, found in the spice turmeric (a common ingredient in curries), is to be investigated in a Phase I/II trial for the treatment of bowel cancer. Used in traditional Indian medicine, the possible therapeutic effects of curcumin for a diverse range of diseases have long been known.

Now, a team from the University of Leicester, UK, and Cancer Research UK hopes to build on promising results in animal trials — showing that curcumin can enhance the ability of chemotherapy to kill cancer cells — by investigating whether curcumin can improve response to chemotherapy in patients with advanced bowel cancer. Currently, bowel cancer that has metastasized is often treated with a combination of three chemotherapy drugs known as FOLFOX. However, around 40–60% of patients do not respond, and FOLFOX can also cause severe side effects, such as peripheral neuropathy, which may result in the early cessation of treatment. Therefore, according to lead researcher Professor William Steward, “The prospect that curcumin might increase the sensitivity of cancer cells to chemotherapy is exciting because it could mean giving lower doses, so patients have fewer side effects and can keep having treatment for longer.” (*NYDailyNews*, 8 May 2012).

The 2-year trial will recruit 42 patients with bowel cancer and liver metastases; 75% will receive curcumin for 7 days, followed by FOLFOX, and the remainder will receive FOLFOX only. Despite the early stage of research into curcumin, Prof. Steward is “cautiously optimistic that we might see an improvement in outcome” (*FoxNews*, 8 May 2012). Joanna Reynolds, of Cancer Research UK, welcomed the trial but cautioned that it might uncover not only possible benefits of curcumin treatment but also “possible side effects [that high doses] could have for cancer patients” (*BBC News*, 7 May 2012).

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