

NewsLetter



Toxic Turmeric?

Turmeric food supplements linked with liver damage

Turmeric is a yellow spice produced from the root of the plant *Curcuma longa*, mostly grown in India, which has been used for centuries to colour and flavour foods.

In recent years, turmeric and, in particular its main active constituent, curcumin, have increasingly been used as ingredients in food supplements.

Curcumin or diferuloylmethane is found within the rhizome (underground stem) of *Curcuma longa*. Together with its derivatives desmethoxycurcumin (DMC) and bisdemethoxycurcumin (BDMC) these are collectively called "curcuminoids".

Food supplements containing Turmeric or Curcumin often claim to have health benefits although there are currently no authorised health claims for Turmeric, Curcumin or any Curcuminoids. As a result, there has been an increase in the sale of turmeric based food supplements. There has also been an increase in reported adverse effects, primarily hepatotoxic in nature, linked to the consumption of Turmeric based food supplements.

What are the health concerns regarding Turmeric supplements?

Whilst there is no evidence that consumption of turmeric as part of a normal diet has any adverse effect on health, indeed "Curcumin" is an authorised food colouring (E100), there have been a rise of reported incidents of adverse events related to consumption of raw and powdered turmeric and its supplements.

In particular, cases of liver damage have been linked with the consumption of Turmeric based food supplements.

In order to increase the perceived beneficial effects of Turmeric in food supplements, additional ingredients, such as piperine, may be present in the supplement to improve absorption of curcuminoids.

Also, food supplements can recommend the consumption of large doses of raw and powdered Turmeric, exposing the consumer to much higher levels of curcuminoids than would normally be experienced dietary intake. The high doses and increased bioavailability of curcuminoids due to the presence of piperine may be responsible for the increase in hepatotoxicity.

The Food Standards Agency have sought opinion from the Committee on Toxicity and we await further guidance.

More information

- [Committee on Toxicity "Statement on the potential risk to human health of turmeric and curcumin supplements"](#)
- [HHRA Interactive Drug Analysis Profile Curcumin](#)
- [Welsh Medicines Advice Service: Advising patients using turmeric on its potential adverse effects](#)

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- Novel Foods
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