

From Science News

"A spice takes on Alzheimer's disease."

(Biomedicine).(use of curcumin may reduce risk of Alzheimer's disease)(Brief Article)

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India has one of the lowest rates of Alzheimer's disease in the world. A diet rich in curcumin, a spice used in yellow curry, may offer a potential explanation and a new therapy for the brain disorder, according to a new study.

Research over the past few years has documented that regular use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, significantly reduces a person's chance of developing Alzheimer's disease (SN: 8/12/00, p. 101). Yet physicians hesitate to recommend regular use of NSAIDs because the drugs can have serious side effects, including liver and kidney damage, when taken for extended periods.

Looking for a safer and perhaps better, option Greg M. Cole and Sally A. Frautsch of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) have turned to curcumin. The spice has well-known anti-inflammatory properties and is safe even when people regularly ingest large amounts. Unlike NSAIDs, curcumin is also an antioxidant--it thwarts the damage caused by reactive molecules called free radicals. Such damage may contribute to Alzheimer's disease, the researchers note.

The UCLA scientists have tested curcumin on mice genetically engineered to develop the brain lesions called amyloid plaques, which characterize Alzheimer's disease. In one experiment, the plaque burden in mice eating food laced with curcumin was 43 percent less compared with that in mice not ingesting the spice. Eating curcumin also reduced inflammation and free radical damage in the mouse brains, the researchers report. --J.T.
