Turmeric – The Wonder Spice

Written by Jill Grunewald and published in tastebud magazine, Nov. 2008

tastebud

It seems that everywhere you turn, more and more nutritional guidance is pointing to evidence that keeping inflammation in the body at bay is the key to a long, healthy life, free of degenerative disease. We’re not talking about the swelling and redness you get when your sprain your ankle or burn your hand; we’re talking about “silent inflammation,” a term coined by Dr. Barry Sears, one of the world’s leading medical researchers and experts on the link between inflammation and disease.

If I Can’t See it, Then it Must Not Exist
According to Dr. Sears, “Silent inflammation is simply inflammation that falls below the threshold of perceived pain. That’s what makes it so dangerous. You don’t take any steps to stop it as it smolders for years, if not decades, eventually erupting into what we call chronic disease.” I like to think of it as a bunch of armed outlaws roaming our bodies and robbing us of our health.

I know this is a sobering topic. I don’t mean to be Debbie Downer. The good news is that reversing premature aging and halting the onset of chronic disease is…pretty easy. You just have to want to do it.

There is no strict diet. There are no drugs with sketchy side effects. You can still enjoy your favorite food vices (in moderation).

Many anti-inflammatory foods are mentioned in a few of my past presentmagazine.com articles, including Acne – Face it Naturally, Fish Meets Grill, Winter Warming, Go Green, and Gimme Some (Healthy) Skin. In addition to eating an anti-inflammatory diet the majority of the time, there are two supplements that you must, MUST take daily – high quality Omega-3 fatty acids and turmeric. Consider them your arsenal.

Omega-3s have gotten a lot of attention these last few years and are essential for reducing inflammation and protecting us against degenerative diseases such as arthritis and cancer and for preventing heart attacks and strokes. Dr. Sears, who taught a class at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition, where I attended school, said, “If you don’t take anything else away from this class, take this…get your Omega-3s every single day. Even if you eat Krispy Kreme donuts every day, you can ward off inflammation and disease by taking your Omega 3s.”

Bright Star
Turmeric, a brightly colored relative of ginger and the essential ingredient in curry, is an honest to goodness miracle spice with truly stunning anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer properties itself. In recent studies, it has proven to outperform many pharmaceuticals in the treatment of many chronic, debilitating diseases.
Much attention is currently being given to turmeric’s anti-cancer compounds, both for the prevention and treatment of the disease. We all have cancer cells in our body; they need new blood vessels to survive and if you cut off their supply, the cancerous cells’ growth is greatly inhibited. According to Dr. David Servan-Schreiber, brain cancer survivor, clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh Medical School, and author of *Anticancer: A New Way of Life*, “Turmeric is the most powerful natural anti-inflammatory agent known to man and has the ability to slow down the growth of new blood vessels. Indians have vastly less cancer than we do because they eat curry every day.”

**A Host of Benefits**

Other well-studied advantages of turmeric include the prevention and treatment of Alzheimer’s disease (by reducing plaques that impede cerebral function) and arthritis (by inhibiting the enzyme that promotes inflammation, pain, and swelling). If this weren’t enough, turmeric protects the liver, lowers bad cholesterol, is a powerful antioxidant, aids in digestion, reduces canker and cold sores, tones the spleen and pancreas, regulates blood sugar, is the highest known source of beta carotene, and can be taken as minor pain relief (in lieu of aspirin or ibuprofen).

Like me, you probably don’t want to start eating Indian food every day. So please do yourself a favor and begin taking turmeric daily. Believe me, I know it can get very confusing navigating the world of nutritional supplements; perusing the aisles of bottle after bottle is a practice in information overload. I have been a pill popper for many years, but as we get more of our needs met from whole foods that contain important nutrients and phytochemicals, we can wean ourselves off of a long list of capsules and tablets. But I’m more than convinced that Omega 3s and turmeric are critical to good health and long life. You simply can’t afford not to take them.