

Turmeric, the Golden Spice Part 2:

Ten Traditional Uses and Eight Ways to Verify Quality

Turmeric has a long medicinal, religious, and culinary history that spans thousands of years, particularly in Asia. Below are some of the well-documented historical uses of turmeric across different cultures and practices:

1. Ayurvedic Medicine (India)

- **Anti-inflammatory and Digestive Aid:** In **Ayurvedic medicine**, which dates back over 3,000 years, turmeric was (and still is) used as a treatment for various ailments, particularly digestive disorders. It was known to balance the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) and was used to alleviate conditions like indigestion, bloating, and gas. Additionally, its anti-inflammatory properties made it useful for treating joint pain, wounds, and skin conditions.
- **Blood Purifier:** Turmeric was believed to purify the blood and promote good circulation. It was often used in tonics to improve liver function, cleanse the blood, and detoxify the body.
- **Skin Health:** Turmeric was applied topically in paste form to treat skin conditions, promote wound healing, and as a natural antiseptic for cuts and burns. Its use in cosmetic treatments, such as face masks, remains popular today to improve skin tone and reduce acne.

2. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

- **Pain and Inflammation:** Turmeric was used in **Traditional Chinese Medicine** to relieve pain, particularly joint pain, and reduce inflammation. It was also used to improve blood circulation and treat menstrual pain.
- **Digestive Health:** Similar to its use in Ayurveda, turmeric was used in TCM to treat digestive issues such as bloating, stomach pain, and loss of appetite. It was also believed to stimulate the flow of qi (energy) and resolve blood stagnation, a condition associated with pain and poor circulation.

3. Religious and Cultural Uses (India and Southeast Asia)

- **Ceremonial Use:** In **Hinduism**, turmeric has been used for centuries in religious and cultural ceremonies. It is considered sacred and symbolizes purity, fertility, and prosperity. For example, turmeric paste is often applied to brides and grooms in Hindu wedding ceremonies as part of a ritual known as the "**haldi ceremony**" to bless them with good fortune and protect them from evil spirits.
- **Dyeing and Symbolism:** Turmeric was historically used as a natural dye for clothing and fabrics. The yellow color of turmeric was symbolic of **purity and sacredness** in many religious contexts. It was often used to dye the robes of monks in Southeast Asia and India.
- **Spiritual Cleansing:** Turmeric was also used in various rituals as a means of warding off evil and purifying spaces or individuals, including during the worship of deities and in rituals meant to cleanse the body and mind.

4. Culinary Uses (South Asia and Middle East)

- **Spice in Cooking:** Turmeric has been used for thousands of years in South Asian and Middle Eastern cuisines. It is a key ingredient in curries, stews, and rice dishes, adding flavor, color, and nutritional benefits. Historically, its antimicrobial properties were also valued for preserving food.
- **Fermented and Pickled Foods:** In parts of Southeast Asia, turmeric was used in the fermentation and pickling of vegetables, as it could extend the shelf life and impart a distinct color and flavor.

5. Siddha Medicine (India)

- **Cold and Respiratory Health:** In **Siddha medicine**, a traditional system from Southern India, turmeric was widely used to treat colds, coughs, and respiratory infections. The practice of mixing turmeric with milk or honey (often referred to as "**golden milk**") originated here and was believed to boost immunity and relieve respiratory symptoms.
- **Antibacterial Properties:** Turmeric was applied to wounds and cuts as an antiseptic to prevent infection, capitalizing on its antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties.

6. Middle Eastern Traditional Medicine

- **Liver Health and Jaundice:** In **Persian medicine**, turmeric was used to treat jaundice and other liver-related conditions. It was believed to enhance liver function and stimulate bile production, which helped detoxify the body and improve digestion.
- **Aphrodisiac and Fertility:** In some Middle Eastern traditions, turmeric was used as an aphrodisiac and a tonic to improve reproductive health, believed to enhance fertility and sexual vitality.

7. Medieval Europe

- **Exotic Spice and Dye:** Turmeric was introduced to Europe via the spice trade routes. While it wasn't commonly used in European medieval medicine, it was highly prized as an exotic spice and occasionally used as a cheaper substitute for saffron. It was also used in dyeing textiles, especially in the dyeing of robes and fabrics for religious purposes.
- **Medicinal Use:** Some early European herbalists documented the use of turmeric in treating a range of conditions, from jaundice and liver disorders to skin diseases, although its medicinal use wasn't as widespread as in Asia.

8. African Traditional Medicine

- **Skin Conditions and Wound Healing:** In some African cultures, turmeric was used as a natural remedy for skin conditions, burns, and infections. It was applied topically as a paste to treat eczema, acne, and minor wounds, utilizing its antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.

9. Southeast Asia

- **Postpartum Care:** In many Southeast Asian cultures, turmeric was used in postnatal care for women. New mothers were often given turmeric-based tonics to promote healing, reduce inflammation, and restore energy. This practice is still followed in some parts of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.
- **Digestive and Liver Health:** Turmeric tonics were commonly consumed to enhance digestion and improve liver function, treating conditions like indigestion, jaundice, and liver inflammation.

10. Turmeric in Western Medicine

- **Introduction in the West:** By the 20th century, turmeric began gaining attention in the West for its medicinal properties. Western herbalists and researchers started to investigate curcumin, the active compound in turmeric, for its potential with inflammatory diseases, cancer, and neurodegenerative conditions. Today, turmeric is commonly used in natural and integrative medicine for a variety of health needs.

How to Determine the Quality of Turmeric

With the popularity of turmeric supplements, powders, and products rising, it's important that the turmeric you're purchasing is the highest quality. Physician's Strength uses a premium [wild-grown](#) variety of Turmeric from a protected National Forest Preserve in India. The wild status of any herb, root, or plant is highly prized, even above farmed organic sources. This is for two reasons. First, the antioxidant and curcumin content can be harvested at higher levels than its

counterparts. Secondly, protected wild turmeric is not subjected to the same heavy metals, pesticides, and other contaminants often found in commercially farmed Turmeric.

Poor-quality turmeric may contain fillers, and additives, or be adulterated with synthetic compounds. Here are ways to vet the quality of turmeric:

1. Check for Third-Party Testing

When purchasing turmeric supplements, look for products that have been tested by third-party organizations. This ensures that the product contains the ingredients listed on the label and is free from harmful contaminants such as heavy metals, pesticides, and adulterants. Lead and other heavy metals are often tested in high levels with Turmeric. You can visit [FDA.gov](https://www.fda.gov) to see the numerous recalls on turmeric powders!

2. Examine the Curcumin and Turmerone content

While turmeric is rich in beneficial compounds, curcumin is the most studied. However, too much curcumin will not leave enough room for other necessary compounds, like turmerones. Most turmeric supplements will list their curcumin content by percentage. Since this process often involves petrochemical solvents. It's important to know which ones are used. Class 1 and Class 2 solvents can be more hazardous, even in small amounts. Examples of this are Methanol and Hexane (Class 2) or Benzene (Class 1). For supplements, we suggest avoiding those that contain more than **90% curcuminoids** for optimal health benefits. Class 3 solvents are the preferred option and less hazardous, such as (Ethyl Acetate). Still, **organic Ethanol combined with CO2 extraction** is our best choice and found to be the most beneficial, overall.

3. Consider Bioavailability Enhancers

Curcumin, by itself, has low absorption, meaning that it is not easily retained in the body. While it has been said that quality turmeric supplements will often include bioavailability enhancers such as piperine (black pepper extract), this can also be too strong for those with sensitive digestive tracts. Some formulations may also use **liposomal delivery systems** or **micellar technology** to improve bioavailability, but this can involve the use of soy, which may be GMO-contaminated. Micellization is our preferred technique, and this is a process of blending the raw material vigorously, which reduces the molecule size, allowing for a higher and easier absorption intake.

4. Check for Organic or wild status

Organic certification ensures that the turmeric you are purchasing has been grown without the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers. This is especially important for turmeric root powder, as non-organic turmeric may contain harmful chemical residues. Source matters greatly with turmeric, as contamination is rampant. Wild sources are preferred, because they are more protected, have higher originating curcumin content plus antioxidant levels, and avoid the negatives of commercially farmed operations altogether.

5. Color and Aroma

For turmeric powder, the color and aroma are good indicators of quality. High-quality turmeric should have a rich, deep yellow to orange color. If the powder is pale or dull, it may be old or diluted with fillers like starch or flour. Similarly, fresh turmeric has a strong, earthy aroma with slightly peppery and warm notes. A lack of smell or a weak aroma may indicate poor quality or staleness.

6. Taste Test

If you are using turmeric in its raw or powdered form, a taste test can be revealing. High-quality turmeric will have a bold, slightly bitter, and peppery taste, with a warming effect. Low-quality or adulterated turmeric may taste bland or overly bitter.

7. Avoid Artificial Additives

Some turmeric supplements or powders may contain artificial additives, colorants, or preservatives. These additives can diminish the quality of the product and may pose health risks. Always check the ingredient label for any unnecessary additives and opt for products with minimal or no additives. For example, turmeric powders and tablets often contain undesirable additives such as maltodextrin, silicon dioxide, starches, and colorings. These are unhealthy, lessen the effects of the turmeric, and should be avoided.

8. Sourcing

The origin of turmeric can affect its quality. Turmeric from India and Sri Lanka are considered superior quality due to the ideal growing conditions and traditional cultivation methods. Look for products that clearly state the sourcing of their turmeric, and favor those with transparent supply chains.

Conclusion

Turmeric has a rich history that spans cultures and continents, valued for its medicinal, religious, and culinary significance. From its use in traditional medicine systems like Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine, to its incorporation into religious ceremonies, turmeric has been a cornerstone of human health and culture for thousands of years. Modern science continues to validate many of the traditional uses, particularly its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and antimicrobial properties, making it as relevant today as it was in ancient times.

Turmeric is a powerful spice that offers a wide range of health benefits, from supporting the body's response to inflammation and oxidative stress to aiding brain and heart health. Turmeric has been extensively studied for its therapeutic effects, with more than 3,500 studies published, making it a valuable addition to any diet or health regimen.

*Results May Vary: These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.