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## Curcumin: Question 3

Most super herbs and juices come from other countries—açai from Brazil and noni from Southeast Asia to Australia. Curcumin seems to have been used in India for hundreds of years. As we finish this look on questions we should ask about the latest and greatest nutrient, juice, or herb, this is most likely the simplest question of all. Here's the obvious question: do the people where the herb is traditionally used live longer than we do in the U.S.?

I'll stick with curcumin and India. Although our official life expectancy just decreased a couple of months, people in the U.S. live to an average 78 while those in India live to 65 (1). I know what you're thinking: living conditions in India and the medical care are much different than in the U.S. True, but if curcumin had a significant effect on cancer and diabetes, that shouldn't matter.

Another related question would be whether the rate of disease is better where the herb is traditionally used; this answer proved to be virtually impossible to find. There are statistics from the World Health Organization related to infectious diseases, but heart disease and cancer are tough. It may be because India has a population four times the U.S. and may not have a similar electronic medical records reporting system. On appearance, cancer rates appear to be lower. However, because people don't live as long in India, it's tough to make a direct comparison; something else may kill people before cancer has a chance to strike. This doesn't help.

How about a specific disease such as arthritis, an inflammatory condition? The data are sparse, but it appears that the rate of arthritis is that same as in more modern countries (2,3). If turmeric is consumed regularly, or even if used for medicinal purposes, it doesn't seem to affect the rate of arthritis, at least as it relates to pain.

A confounding factor is that the basic diet is vastly different between India and the U.S. No supplement or nutrient is an island; we have to look at the totality and how all the nutrients interact. Theoretically a nutrient that makes a difference when people follow one type of diet might be superfluous for those who have a completely different way of eating.

There are more questions such as the long-term benefits or consequences of jumping on the latest and greatest bandwagon and how a nutrient reacts with the genetic tendencies specific to the region. My purpose was not to provide answers; it was to illustrate that there are a lot of questions to consider no matter what the herb, juice, or supplement may be. As I said back in April, there appears to be no reason not to use curcumin if you want to use it. Just understand that not every basic question has been answered yet. Maybe the answers won't make any difference. Or maybe they will. Only time will tell.



What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**

### References:

1. [http://www.who.int/gho/publications/world\\_health\\_statistics/EN\\_WHS2013\\_Full.pdf](http://www.who.int/gho/publications/world_health_statistics/EN_WHS2013_Full.pdf)
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