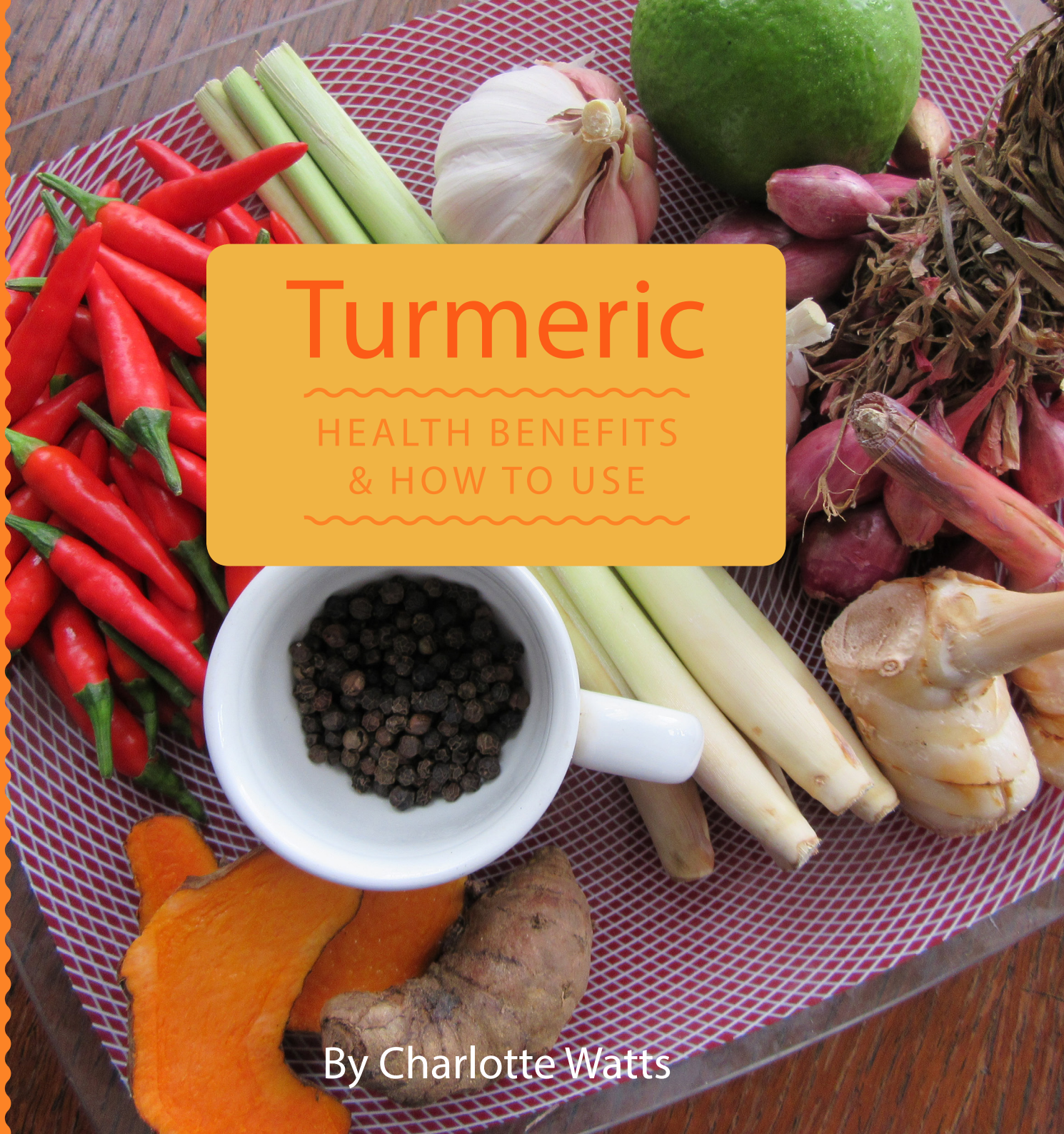

Turmeric

HEALTH BENEFITS & HOW TO USE

By Charlotte Watts

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The beautiful bright orange spice turmeric is the powdered root of the turmeric plant, a member of the Zingiberaceae or ginger family. Turmeric is as important a player in the kitchen for therapeutic and preventative health as its close cousin. Turmeric has been long used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and traditional Indian Ayurvedic medicine as a remedy for joint problems, digestive problems, menstrual irregularities and liver complaints. Recently extensive research has followed the statistics that Indian levels of heart disease, inflammatory conditions such as arthritis and cancers are much lower than in The West. The active compound in turmeric, curcumin has also shown to prevent multiple schlerosis, Alzheimer's disease, ulcers, skin complaints, carpal tunnel syndrome and most digestive disorders.

Curcumin has shown to slow down phase I liver detoxification, while egging on phase II, this helps to move toxins more quickly through the two phases to be eliminated from the body. This may explain turmeric's powerful anticancer properties and its ability to help cholesterol and hormone regulation. Asian diets contain enormous amounts of turmeric, part of the traditional diet from early childhood, starting this protection preventatively from young. It would be quite difficult for us to emulate these amounts and although we can continue our love of Asian cooking, turmeric is notably difficult for humans to absorb and it has been said that we only absorb 4% of the active curcumin contained. This absorption is enhanced by the presence of oil, which also helps to release the volatile oils including tumerone, atlantone, and zingiberone, helping turmeric's action in preventing damage to fats including cholesterol. Supplementary turmeric is now popular for this reason.

• Used in skin preparations, as an anti-inflammatory and to keep skin glowing and as a natural sunscreen.
• Antiseptic and antibacterial to support healing and youthful immunity.
• Specific cholesterol lowering properties for optimal heart and brain function.

Turmeric has also shown to be helpful for supporting good mood and even helping to alleviate depression, with studies showing that it affects the brain and nervous system in the following ways, all of which also help to protect against the negative effects of stress in the mind-body:

• Protective antioxidant effect against the oxidative and inflammatory responses generated during stress and now linked to depressive states, as well as memory issues, poor focus etc.
• Increases the level of neurotrophic factors that are responsible for growth and survival of nerve cells, so in the brain, but also through muscles and how we move.
• Helps modulate neurotransmitters (brain chemicals) like dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine by preventing their breakdown, helping us regulate mood, sleep and energy.

Many people are now turning to turmeric supplements as an addition to their diets, particularly as an anti-inflammatory agent and digestive remedy, often taken with bromelain from pineapples or piperine from pepper for absorption. This can be a more practical way to take as you would need to eat 100 gram (about 3 1/2 ounces) of turmeric in its spice form to get the therapeutic dose equivalent of curcumin (1.2 g per day), but the recipes here also offer many ways to get the therapeutic effects of turmeric in your daily diet, alongside other healthy ingredients:

• Turmeric Smoothie – for daily immune support
• Golden Turmeric Milk – illness prevention and recovery, great sleep aid
• Turmeric Tea - illness prevention and recovery
• Thai Yellow Curry Paste – great base for different curries and spicy soups
• Thai Yellow Curry – a classic dish with a host of antioxidants and taste

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LEGEND

NUMBER OF SERVES

PREPARATION TIME

COOKING TIME

SERVES 2

5-10 MINUTES

Turmeric Smoothie

This delicious and hearty drink is packed full of immune-supporting antioxidants, including lots of fat-soluble carotenoids like beta-carotene and lutein to support fatty areas like the brain, organs, eyes and skin.

INGREDIENTS

½ papaya (peeled and roughly chopped) – you could substitute for mango if preferred

1 tsp papaya seeds (they have a pepper-y/ watercress-y kick to them)

1 carrot (peeled and roughly chopped)

1 apple (roughly chopped)

50-80g chunk (¼ - ½ cup) butternut squash (peeled and roughly chopped) – you could omit this or add extra carrot if preferred

1 cm (½ inch) turmeric root (sliced – peel if the skin is thick)

1 ½ inches ginger root (sliced – peel if the skin is thick)

½ lime juiced

250ml-500ml (1-2 cups) coconut water

METHOD

Put all fruit, veg and flavourings into a blender but not all of the coconut water straight away, start with 100-200mls (¼ - ½ a cup), this will help to make the smoothie smoother

Blitz away

Add some more coconut water, blitz again and then continue adding more coconut water until you get the desired consistency. How much you need will vary slightly depending on the size of your fruit/veg and also depending on how thick you would like your smoothie

This recipe will make 2 portions, you can keep one in the fridge for the next day.

MAKES ENOUGH FOR 10-20 USES

5 MINUTES

Golden Turmeric Paste

For this recipe you can make up a batch of turmeric paste to keep in a jar in the fridge and use it each time you need it. You could also add the paste to roasted nuts or any other recipes which call for powdered turmeric. A simple, but effective home medicinal paste providing the immune modulating properties of turmeric, medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs – the fats in coconut oil) and capsaicin in pepper.

INGREDIENTS

40g (¼ cup) turmeric powder

80-120ml (½ cup) water

¼ tsp finely ground pepper

1 dessert spoon coconut oil

METHOD

Put turmeric powder and water in a pan, bring to the boil and cook for a few minutes. You want a paste consistency, add a little more water as you cook if you need to

Take off the heat, add pepper and coconut oil. Stir through the paste and allow to cool

You can then keep this in a jar in the fridge for a few weeks and use as required.

SERVES 1

5 MINUTES

Golden Turmeric Milk

This non-dairy drink means less strain on the immune system than mucous-producing milk can provoke. Nut or seed milks are the best choice, rather than those from grains. Choosing the best quality Manuka honey or locally sourced ensures the honey is not just a sugar hit. But supports, rather than depletes your immune system.

INGREDIENTS

250ml (1 cup) almond milk (or other non-dairy milk substitute)

1 tsp turmeric paste

½ tsp raw honey (if required to sweeten)

PREPARATION METHOD

Warm the milk in a saucepan with turmeric and mix well (do not boil or your milk may split)

Add a little raw honey to taste if required for sweetness

SERVES 1

5 MINUTES

Turmeric Tea

This traditional immune-supporting tea is both soothing and packed full of active ingredients that has shown to enhance our bacteria and virus fighting capacity.

INGREDIENTS
(FOR ONE CUP)

1 cm (½ inch) turmeric root (thinly sliced)

1 inch ginger root (thinly sliced)

1 slice lemon (unwaxed)

PREPARATION METHOD

Add to mug and top with boiling water

Allow to infuse for a few minutes before drinking (you do not need to strain the tea to remove the ingredients unless the flavour becomes too strong for your taste)

Thai Yellow Curry Paste

SERVES 1

15 MINUTES (IF USING A BLENDER OR 30 MINUTES OR MORE IF POUNDING BY HAND)

Making our own curry pastes is simple, fun and produces vibrant and healthy results from fresh ingredients. The shrimp paste is optional is you are a vegetarian and add more turmeric instead if you can't source galangal.

INGREDIENTS

60g fresh red birds eye chillies (green stems removed)

10g (1 heaped tbsp.) dried chilli flakes

1 head (bulb) approx. 50g garlic (skins peeled off)

10g (1 tbsp.) peppercorns

40g (¼ cup) shallots (peeled)

4-5 sticks lemongrass (most fibrous outer layer and tops and bottoms removed and then roughly chopped – you can reserve these and infuse them in a tea or a curry if you wish)

50g (about 2 inches) galangal (roughly chopped)

50g (about 4 inches – as it is generally thinner than galangal) turmeric root (peeled)

½ kaffir lime – peel only (a normal lime works fine if you aren't able to get hold of a kaffir lime)

1 heaped tbsp. shrimp paste

1 tsp salt

1-2 heaped tsp coconut oil

METHOD

Most Thai curry pastes suggest making them in a pestle and mortar as the pounding action releases the oils and develops the flavour more fully, however, unless you have an hour to spare you're unlikely to want to make it by the pestle and mortar method and can make the paste in a blender instead. You may need to give your blender a rest half way depending on the power of its motor. You will also want to bear in mind that fresh turmeric can heavily stain anything it comes into contact with so I wouldn't recommend making it in anything you don't want to have a slight yellow tinge to it for a while afterwards. Lemon is good for getting off turmeric stains and if needed you can also use vinegar and bicarbonate of soda to soak the stained items before you clean them. You will also want to avoid getting turmeric on your hands as it will also stain skin and nails, so avoid touching the turmeric where possible or putting gloves or a small plastic bag over your hands when handling it.

Add all the ingredients except the shrimp paste and coconut oil to the blender and blitz with a pulsing motion. You will have to open up the blender and scrape down the sides a few times and perhaps give your blender a few shakes to get the ingredients moving.

Once all the ingredients are looking fairly well blitzed you can then add the coconut oil and shrimp paste and blitz further. At this point it should start to come together a bit more due to the moisture in these ingredients. You should end up with a spoonable paste.

You can then to store this in an airtight sterilized jar in your fridge and it should keep for 1-2 months after making. Be sure not to have any air bubbles in the jar under the curry paste as the air pockets may make the paste go off quicker. It should make around a 400ml jar of paste.

Thai Yellow Curry

(using paste above)

SERVES 4-6 | 15 MINUTES | 30 MINUTES

This beautiful curry can be an immune and digestion supporting staple. It freezes well, so you can make in batches and get one out to defrost for dinner before you leave for work. You can use shop-bought curry paste if you haven't been able to make your own and you can substitute a vegetarian stock for the fish sauce if you need.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp Thai Yellow Curry Paste (more or less to taste)
2 tsp coconut oil
1 tsp turmeric powder (or golden turmeric paste if you have already made this, see recipe above)
1 tbsp fish sauce
2 tins coconut milk
Handful of shallots (peeled and sliced)
1 large aubergine (cubed)/6 small Thai aubergines (quartered)/large handful of pea aubergines
1 carrot (peeled and sliced into discs/batons)
1 red pepper (sliced)
½ kohl rabi (cut into sticks)
½ to 1 courgette (sliced)
6-8 baby corns (halved lengthways)
2 large handfuls spinach
4 spring onions (finely sliced)
100g butternut squash (peeled and cut into 1cm/ ½ inch cubes)
100g (½ cup) cashew nuts
Salt and pepper
Coriander leaf (chopped to garnish)

METHOD

Prepare all the veg in advance before you start cooking

Add the butternut squash to a tray with a little salt, pepper, a teaspoon of golden turmeric paste or just 1 tsp of powdered turmeric and some coconut oil and roast in a pre-heated oven at 180°c/350°F/gas mark 4 for 20-30 minutes, turning occasionally.

In a wok, fry the curry paste on a medium-high heat in the coconut oil for a minute or two

Add shallots and fish sauce and fry for a further minute or two, being careful not to let them brown

Add the red pepper, carrots and aubergine and fry for a few more minutes

Pour in 2 tins of coconut milk, bring this up to heat (being careful just to let it simmer and not boil or your coconut milk may separate)

Add courgette and kohl rabi, cook for 5 minutes, then add the baby corn and cook for a further 5 minutes until all veg begins to soften

Remove your butternut squash from the oven, add cashews, stir together so they get coated in the turmeric and oil then return to the oven for 5 minutes until cashews are roasted

Finally add spring onions and spinach for the final 1-2 minutes of cooking

Serve in a bowl with the roast squash, cashews and chopped coriander leaf scattered over the top

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Enjoy!

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