

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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September 12, 2021

## “Four Powerful Supplements”

Thousands of supplements are readily available and tirelessly promoted. Some are effective and can bring health benefits, while others may be purely snake oil. But there are several little-known supplements whose health benefits rival those of currently available prescription drugs. **Curcumin (Turmeric).** Curcumin is a biologically active polyphenolic compound found in turmeric, which is a spice made from the rhizomes of *Curcuma longa Linn*, a perennial shrub indigenous to India. Curcumin has been used for centuries for medicinal purposes and is most commonly cultivated and consumed in Asian countries. In several studies, curcumin has been shown to decrease pain when taken over the long term. Curcumin seems to have anti-cancer benefits due to its ability to initiate autophagy. It has also been shown to decrease risks for colorectal, prostate, and breast cancers. And, for those with cancer, curcumin may enhance the efficacy of chemotherapy as well as protect healthy cells from radiation therapy. The recommended daily dose for curcumin is approximately 500 mg. Because it's fat soluble, curcumin should be taken with a meal or other source of fat (e.g., fish oil) to boost absorption. **Berberine.** Berberine is a compound found in many plants, including European barberry and the Oregon tree. Like curcumin, it is yellow, and—in ages past—used to dye wool, leather, and wood. This substance has anti-inflammatory properties and may also have lipid-lowering and anti-diabetic effects. Berberine may also have anti-fungal and antibiotic properties. Finally, its antimicrobial effects, cardiovascular protection, and cancer-fighting abilities make berberine a multitasking supplement superhero. **Spirulina.** A type of cyanobacteria, spirulina is blue-green mixture of algae species that contains bioactive compounds. It was a food source for the Aztecs and other Mesoamericans until the 16th century but was recently popularized when NASA considered growing it in space to feed astronauts. And now we know why: Spirulina is chock-full of nutrients. Spirulina has been shown, in preliminary studies, to not only lower lipid peroxidation, triglyceride, and blood pressure levels, but also boost the immune system. And, great news for all the allergy sufferers out there: Spirulina may even significantly reduce nasal allergy symptoms. **Red Yeast Rice.** Red yeast rice is a fermented product of rice on which red yeast has been grown. It has been used in China for centuries as a medicinal food that promotes circulation. Red yeast rice may reduce cholesterol levels and be beneficial in those with hyperlipidemia. Red yeast rice may be useful for the secondary prevention of myocardial infarction.

In the America that I love, we must realize that some claims of supplements are real. But they can falsely claim almost anything, by avoiding the words, "cure, treat, diagnose or prevent." There are no magical pills for quick fixes.

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