

Five years ago Darci Jayne hardly ever touched a vegetable and pretty much lived on pizza, pasta and fast food.

That diet led to weight gain and health problems, including severe joint pain. "I was close to 200 pounds and getting scared," she says.

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By cutting portion sizes she lost 50 pounds but always felt as if she were on a diet. Then Jayne took an Indian cooking class that emphasized fresh vegetables and curry spices.

She began to whip up an Indian dinner once or twice a week — and soon she noticed she wasn't always looking for a late-night snack. And the curry in the food offered her a bonus: It seemed to ease the pain and swelling in her joints.

"I have arthritis," says Jayne, 55. "But I'm moving better now."

Preliminary research suggests Jayne may be right. A study in the November issue of *Arthritis &*

*Rheumatism* suggests turmeric, **one component of curry spice, almost completely prevented joint swelling in rats with arthritis. Other studies have**

**suggested that the spice could protect against diseases such as heart disease, cancer and Alzheimer's, a degenerative brain disease that afflicts nearly 5 million people in the USA.**

Rates of Alzheimer's in India are about four times lower than in the USA, says Gregory Cole, a researcher at the University of California-Los Angeles. His studies suggest that curry contains a powerful substance that might protect the brain from damage that leads to Alzheimer's.

**Surprising findings in mice** :Can scientists prove curry wards off such diseases as Alzheimer's or cancer? Not yet, says Bharat Aggarwal at the University of Texas-Houston. But he says the growing file on curry includes compelling evidence gleaned from animal and human studies. The findings from Western science fit with what traditional Indian healers have long said about turmeric. "They call it the spice of life," says P. Murali Doraiswamy, an Alzheimer's expert at Duke University in Durham, N.C.

For centuries, doctors trained in Ayurvedic medicine, a traditional medical system in India, have turned to turmeric to treat inflammatory diseases such as arthritis, says Janet Funk, a researcher at the University of Kansas. In the USA, many people with arthritis take over-the-counter supplements that contain curcumin, the active ingredient in turmeric.

In the November study, Funk and her colleagues gave rats that were bred to develop rheumatoid arthritis injections of turmeric. "The turmeric almost completely prevented the onset of arthritis," Funk says. The spice also seemed to help stop joint destruction in rats that had already started to develop the disease, she says.

Curry also may offer some protection against cancer. "Indians eat from 100 to 200 milligrams of curry every day, and that might be enough to prevent cancer," says Aggarwal of the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center at the University of Texas.

The curcumin in curry seems to shut down genes that trigger the development and the spread of breast cancer, animal studies in Aggarwal's lab suggest. And a preliminary human study suggests curcumin supplements might — in a handful of cases — be able to stabilize pancreatic cancer, he says.

Epidemiology studies in humans also have linked frequent use of turmeric spice to lower rates of breast, prostate and colon cancer, he says.

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