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Curry spice 'kills cancer cells'



The yellow spice gives curries their bright colour

An extract found in the bright yellow curry spice turmeric can kill off cancer cells, scientists have shown.

The chemical - curcumin - has long been thought to have healing powers and is already being tested as a treatment for arthritis and even dementia.

Now tests by a team at the Cork Cancer Research Centre show it can destroy gullet cancer cells in the lab.

Cancer experts said the findings in the British Journal of Cancer could help doctors find new treatments.

Dr Sharon McKenna and her team found that curcumin started to kill cancer cells within 24 hours.

'Natural' remedy

The cells also began to digest themselves, after the curcumin triggered lethal cell death signals.

Dr McKenna said: "Scientists have known for a long time that natural compounds have the potential to treat faulty cells that have become cancerous and we suspected that curcumin might have therapeutic value."

Dr Lesley Walker, director of cancer information at Cancer Research UK, said: "This is interesting research which opens up the possibility that natural chemicals found in turmeric could be developed into new treatments for oesophageal cancer.

"Rates of oesophageal cancer rates have gone up by more than a half since the 70s and this is thought to be linked to rising rates of obesity, alcohol intake and reflux disease so finding ways to prevent this disease is important too."

Each year around 7,800 people are diagnosed with oesophageal cancer in the UK. It is the sixth most common cause of cancer death and accounts for around five percent of all UK cancer deaths.