

# How curry spice helped a dying woman beat cancer: Sufferer, 67, turned to kitchen cupboard staple turmeric after five years of failed treatment

- Dieneke Ferguson was diagnosed with the blood cancer myeloma in 2007 and underwent three rounds of chemotherapy as well as four stem cell transplants
- She tried Curcumin, a component of turmeric, and five years on, her cancer cell count is negligible, with her recovery featuring in the *British Medical Journal*
- Curcumin has been linked to a host of benefits, including for heart disease

By [LOIS ROGERS FOR THE DAILY MAIL](#)

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After five years of living with cancer and the ravages of side-effects from repeated unsuccessful treatment, Dieneke Ferguson thought she was finally losing the battle. She had a serious relapse and there seemed little hope.

Dieneke had been diagnosed with the blood **cancer** myeloma in 2007 and had undergone three rounds of chemotherapy as well as four stem cell transplants.

'I have been on all sorts of toxic drugs and the side-effects were terrifying,' she says. 'At one point I lost my memory for three days, and in 2008 two of the vertebrae in my spine collapsed so I couldn't walk. They injected some kind of concrete into my spine to keep it stable.'



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**Dieneke tried Curcumin, a component of turmeric, and five years on, her cancer cell count is negligible, with her recovery featuring in the British Medical Journal. Pictured: Dieneke Ferguson with the Olympics Torch in Brazil**

Yet, despite all this, ‘nothing worked: there was just too much cancer — all my options were exhausted, and there was nothing else I could do,’ she says.

Then Dieneke started a new treatment — not another high-tech, expensive drug, but a remedy based on something many of us have in our kitchen cupboards. Where all others had failed, this one worked, and five years on, Dieneke’s cancer cell count is negligible.

The treatment? Curcumin, which is a key component of the spice turmeric. Dieneke’s recovery was so extraordinary that it recently made the pages of the eminent British Medical Journal as a one-off case report of how a natural ingredient was somehow keeping cancer at bay.

‘When you review her chart, there’s no alternative explanation [for her recovery] other than we’re seeing a response to curcumin,’ Jamie Cavenagh, professor of blood diseases at London’s Barts Hospital and co-author of the report, said.



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After exhausting her options, Dianeke started taking Curcumin, which is a key component of the spice turmeric. Her recovery was so extraordinary that it recently made the pages of the eminent British Medical Journal



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Dianeke is still taking 8g of curcumin in tablet form daily — the equivalent of about two teaspoonfuls of pure powdered curcumin

Dianeke is still taking 8g of curcumin in tablet form daily — the equivalent of about two teaspoonfuls of pure powdered curcumin. As kitchen turmeric contains 2 per cent curcumin, it would be physically impossible to eat enough of the curry spice to get the same dose of curcumin.

She first came across the remedy via an internet support group and decided to try it because, as she says: 'I had nothing to lose'.

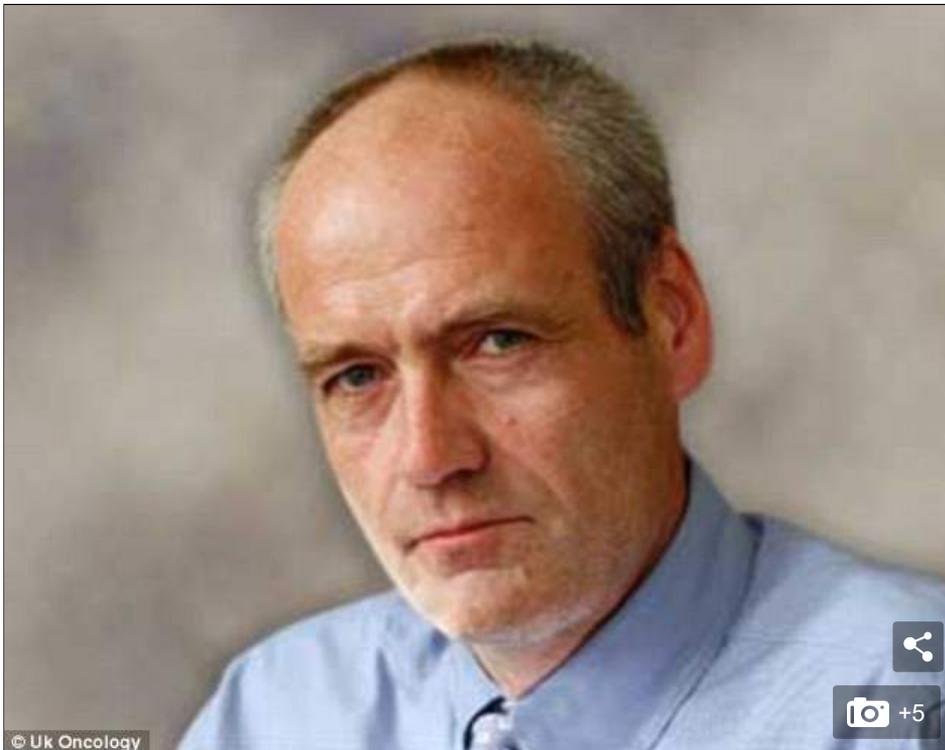
'I told my oncologist I was taking it and he was very interested, especially when it apparently made such a difference,' says Dieneke, 67, who lives in North London and runs Hidden Art, a not-for-profit business helping artists market their work.

Every year about 5,500 people in the UK are diagnosed with myeloma. It occurs when the white blood cells produced in the bone marrow multiply uncontrollably and stop producing the normal antibodies needed to fight infection. The process causes bone damage, intense pain, fatigue and nerve damage.

It can be checked by drugs, but is incurable. Most people who develop it do not live beyond five years of diagnosis. Dieneke is convinced curcumin could help some of them. 'The problem is that the medical profession can't recommend it,' she says.

For although it is widely used in Eastern medicine, and has been studied for its anti-inflammatory and antiseptic effects, for curcumin to be widely prescribed it must be tested in large-scale trials.

These cost millions, and the investment could never be repaid as there is no money to be made from sales of a natural compound that cannot be patented.



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And yet there is good evidence 'the biological activity' of curcumin is 'real', according to Julie Ryan, a cancer specialist at the University of Rochester Medical Center in New York. She told the journal Nature chemically modified forms may be more effective at reaching tissues, as the raw form interacts with various proteins so works differently from many drugs.

Curcumin has been linked to a host of benefits, including for heart disease, infection, depression and dementia. A U.S. review of evidence for skin conditions, such as acne and psoriasis found 'there is early evidence that turmeric/curcumin products and supplements, both oral and topical, may provide therapeutic benefits for skin health'.

A 2016 review, published in the Journal of Medicinal Food, found there is scientific evidence to support the use of turmeric extract in treating arthritis. However, the researchers called for larger, more rigorous studies to confirm this.

One of those convinced by curcumin's potential is Angus Dalgleish, a professor of cancer at St George's Hospital in South London, who has researched its effect on his patients. 'Curcumin is a strong anti-inflammatory agent and chronic inflammation is the precursor of 99 per cent of all cancers,' he says.

'Taking regular anti-inflammatory agents such as aspirin is known to reduce risk of colon cancer by around 30 per cent and have an impact on the incidence of others, too, but lack of funding for research has prevented most from benefiting from curcumin.'

However, Karen Brown, a professor of translational cancer research at the University of Leicester, has recently got funding for a small trial. She is about to publish results from a study expected to show promising results of curcumin treatment for patients with advanced bowel cancer.

'There were only 28 people in this study, but the conclusions are strong enough to make us want to do bigger trials,' she says.

It clearly doesn't work for everyone, but it can work for some people, adds Professor Cavenagh.

'A lot of my patients take curcumin at different stages of their treatment. I don't object to it. Dieneke's is the best response I have observed and it is clear-cut because we had stopped all other treatment. I have not seen such a convincing response before.'

Maggie Lai, senior research and clinical information specialist at the charity Myeloma UK, also helped with the BMJ report. She cautioned against raising hope for a miracle cure for cancer: 'Curcumin seems to work for some people and not others, but we don't know how it works and this was only a one-off case.'

One of the main problems for researchers, says Professor Brown, is finding a curcumin product that contains a standardised dose, and a formulation with an ingredient that modifies curcumin molecules to improve their absorption.

She believes an Italian curcumin product, marketed here as Turmeric+, containing soy lecithin, which studies have shown is 29 times better absorbed in the bloodstream, could resolve these difficulties. She hopes to get funding for trials using this formulation. It costs £20 for a 28-day supply.

Adam Cleavelly, managing director of FutureYou, which has the distribution rights to Turmeric+, says the company is in talks with universities, including Leicester, to get more human research studies set up.

Dieneke uses a product from an Indian company called Sabinsa, made from three forms of curcumin molecules and which has been recommended by patient forums.

'However, the tablets are expensive — £50 for ten days — but provide a form of curcumin that's better absorbed by the body. If it was available on the NHS it would be much cheaper,' she says.