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Turmeric Cream Decreases Signs of Aging

Deborah Brauser

March 16, 2010 (Miami Beach, Florida) — A new moisturizing cream containing turmeric extract, an ingredient found in curry, significantly improves the appearance of facial spots, fine lines, and wrinkles, according to results from 2 split-face studies (1 with an all-white and 1 with an all-Asian patient population) presented here at the American Academy of Dermatology 68th Annual Meeting.

In fact, the turmeric cream was 15% better at reducing lines and wrinkles than the control product, and reduced hyperpigmentation by almost 15%.

"We've shown, for the first time, clinically relevant antiaging benefits from a turmeric extract," lead author of both studies, Cheri Swanson, PhD, senior scientist at the Proctor and Gamble Company in Cincinnati, Ohio, told *Medscape Dermatology*.

"We're excited about these findings and what they can mean for dermatologists in the future," she added.

Better Formulation Decreases Wrinkles, Age Spots

Although extract from the turmeric plant has been commonly used in complementary and alternative medicines from India because of its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, its deep orange-yellow color and often off-putting odor has limited its use in topical products.

"We couldn't put this [ingredient] into a topical before because it would turn the skin bright orange," reported Dr. Swanson. Recently, developers figured out how to purify the extract, turning it white. "We're now testing this stable formulation at clinically active levels."

For these studies, the investigators sought to assess the effects of the extract on antiaging end points in 2 distinct patient populations; all were using a moisturizer before enrollment.

"We wanted to make sure we weren't just seeing a benefit from someone using a moisturizer for the first time," Dr. Swanson explained.

In the first study, the investigators enrolled 89 white patients (100% female) between the ages of 40 and 60 years at centers in Chicago. After a 2-week skin-conditioning washout period, each participant was randomly assigned to apply a moisturizing cream that contained both turmeric and niacinamide on one side of their face and a cream with niacinamide only (control) on the other side twice daily for 8 weeks.

Photos of patients from both studies were taken at weeks 0 (baseline), 4, and 8, and were analyzed for changes in spot area fraction. They were then evaluated by expert graders for improvements in fine lines and wrinkles (in the first study) or hyperpigmentation age spots (in the second study).

"We wanted to run the studies in the most relevant marketplaces, and aging and age spots are very important end points in Asian markets," explained Dr. Swanson.

Results from the first study showed that the combination cream "was significantly better at reducing the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles than the formulation containing only niacinamide at 4 weeks [$P = .004$], directionally better at 8 weeks [$P = .125$], and significantly better overall [$P = .009$]," Dr. Swanson reported.

In the second study, 105 Asian women (between 25 and 55 years of age) were enrolled at centers in Beijing, China. They underwent a 1-week washout period, followed by a randomized split-face application of a moisturizing cream containing only the turmeric extract on one side of the face and the niacinamide-only cream on the other twice daily for 8 weeks.

Results showed that the turmeric cream reduced the appearance of hyperpigmented spots by 14.16% ($P < .0001$) at 4 weeks and by 14.91% ($P < .0001$) at 8 weeks.

"Overall, linking the turmeric extract to reducing hyperpigmentation was fairly obvious, but linking it to reducing fine lines and wrinkles was really a big surprise to us. And that it worked so well was an even bigger, but happy, surprise," said Dr. Swanson.

She reported that this technology is currently available in a series of products already on the market (under the DDF brand; formerly known as Doctor's Dermatologic Formula).

A Promising Addition?

"In general, I think that this is an interesting study of a topical use of a compound that has been used for many years in a variety of applications," said Amy Decker, MD, from Decker Dermatology.

However, she noted that she "would have liked to have seen the photos from the control side, too" in the poster, and questioned why the end points were different in the 2 racial groups and why the turmeric was mixed with niacinamide in the white group but not in the Asian group.

"In the past, it seems that the topical use of turmeric has been limited by its nonelegant and odoriferous formulation," added Dr. Decker, who noted that these limitations don't seem to be addressed in the trial.

"More user-friendly formulations may help [this extract] advance as a topical therapy for the treatment of photo-aging," she concluded.

Joshua Zeichner, MD, director of cosmetic and clinical research at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, said that he's not surprised that the turmeric extract did well in these studies because of its anti-inflammatory properties that can lead to less skin swelling.

"This may be a promising addition to the antiaging products currently on the market," said Dr. Zeichner.

Neither Dr. Decker nor Dr. Zeichner was involved with these studies.

This study was supported by P&G Beauty, a division of the Procter and Gamble Company, which employs Dr. Swanson. Dr. Decker and Dr. Zeichner have disclosed no relevant financial relationships.

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