Ulcerative colitis (UC) is an autoimmune disease of the colon. Major symptoms of UC include abdominal pain and bloody diarrhea. In more severe stages of the disease, fever, weight loss, dehydration, and anemia may develop.

Like other autoimmune diseases, UC is characterized by alternating flare-ups and periods of remission. Standard treatment involves use of anti-inflammatory drugs to reduce symptoms and induce remission; then, if possible, the same or related drugs are used to maintain remission.

The substance curcumin, an extract of the spice turmeric, is hypothesized to have anti-inflammatory properties. On this basis, it has been tested for use in UC.

In a double-blind, placebo-controlled study, 89 people with quiescent ulcerative colitis were given either placebo or curcumin (one gram twice daily) along with standard treatment. Researchers evaluated disease severity in two ways. Patients filled out a symptoms rating scale; in addition, researchers used endoscopy to examine the state of the colon.

Over the six-month treatment period, relapse rate was significantly lower in the treatment group than in the placebo group. Of the 43 participants who received curcumin, about 5% relapsed compared to 20% of the placebo group. In addition, according to both the symptom rating scale and the endoscopy findings, curcumin-treated participants (on average) experienced reduced disease symptoms compared to placebo-treated participants.

NOTE: Do not attempt to self-treat UC with curcumin alone. All participants in the above study received conventional treatment along with the herbal extract.

REFERENCES: