



Read the Label: Everything You Need to Know About Turmeric in Skincare

Vivien Moon | April 29, 2022



PRCHI PALWE/UNSPLASH

Feel like you need a dictionary every time you look at the ingredient list of a beauty product? Still unsure of the difference between retinol and retinoids? What about the unique benefits of vitamins B, C, and E? Are alpha and beta hydroxy acids the same thing? The skincare aisle can be overwhelming, but you don't need a PhD in cosmetic chemistry to navigate it. With expert help, The AEDITION is demystifying and simplifying the beauty industry — one label at a time.

From culinary masters to homeopathic experts, turmeric has a glowing reputation as a wunderkind, so it's no wonder the beauty world loves it too. A staple of many spice racks, the botanical has also been used in skincare for centuries thanks to its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and anti-microbial benefits (to name a few). However, before you add the golden powder to a DIY mask (don't say we didn't warn you), there are a few things you should know. When used at home, it can leave an orange stain on the skin, but, when formulated by the pros, turmeric can be a dynamo. From head to toe, here's what the experts have to say about the spicy ingredient.

What Is Turmeric?

The *Curcuma zedoaria* (a.k.a. turmeric) plant is a member of the ginger family native to southeast Asia, and the golden spice we know as turmeric powder is made from its root. “It is a very powerful and potent anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, anti-microbial, anti-viral, and antifungal, which provides numerous benefits that have been utilized in Asia for centuries,” says [Terrie Absher](#), a licensed aesthetician and founder of [Total Glow](#) in Silicon Valley.

Curcumin is the active ingredient in turmeric (Absher says it makes up about five percent of it) that gives it the telltale vibrant hue. It is “anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial, pro-aging, and an antioxidant,” explains [Naana Boakye, MD](#), a board certified dermatologist in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. A [2005 study](#) even found that curcumin has anti-cancer properties that inhibit melanoma cell growth and stimulate tumor cell death.

Turmeric, or ‘haldi’ in Ayurveda, has long been noted and used “for its potent antioxidant properties, which address inflammation, free radical damage, digestive health, and more,” Absher shares. To this day, it is used in cooking, medicine, skincare, and ceremonial rituals. “In Ayurveda, turmeric is considered good for all three Doshas – Vata, Pitta, and Kapha – making it the universal healer by balancing the properties of these three Doshas,” Absher explains. “It has been used in Ayurveda by its physicians and practitioners for pharmacological uses, as well as in the home for everyday remedies like colds, infections, treating wounds, arthritis, pain remedy, digestive or respiratory disorders, and as a preventive measure for optimal health.”

When it comes to nutrition (no, we’re not just talking golden lattes), turmeric is known to boost [cardiovascular health](#), strengthen the immune system, and support the [microbiome](#). “Being a nutritionist and having used curcumin as a supplement with my clients before I formulated the golden [Amla Purifying Cleanser](#) in 2003 with this amazing Indian treasure, I’ve seen how it can work for the body,” says Marius Morariu, a holistic nutritionist and the co-founder of [Tracie Martyn](#).

As Absher explains, curcumin continues to be studied for its therapeutic value and potential to strengthen gut health by regulating gut microbiota when taken orally. “Modern medicine now understands that gut health is extremely important, and it’s the increase of ‘bad’ bacteria that can lead to disease,” she says. “So, the protective benefit of turmeric to increase good bacteria makes it the overall healer of both skin and body.” In this sense, turmeric supplementation “is a preventative measure to insure overall health by keeping the foundation of our whole body system strong and functioning,” she adds.

And then there is the cultural significance. In Indian tradition, turmeric plays an important role in weddings. Rooshy Roy, the co-founder and CEO of [AAVRANI](#), explains that the brand’s [Glow Activating Exfoliator](#) was inspired by the ritual of the Haldi ceremony, “in which family and friends shower the couple with a turmeric mixture to bless the marriage and leave the couple glowing.”

The Benefits of Turmeric in Skincare

It's well established that turmeric is a superfood with an array of health benefits, but there is a growing body of research that shows it is similarly super when applied topically to the skin. "While considered an important whole body golden miracle powder, it is also used in skincare application for its lightening and anti-inflammatory properties," Absher says. And that is precisely why the spice is earning a spot in the beauty aisle.

TURMERIC

Soothing acne and eczema, evening skin tone, fighting free radical damage, and brightening the complexion, this gentle golden root is more than just a spice rack staple.

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| <p style="color: #f0e68c; margin: 0;"><i>concerns:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acne Uneven Skin Tone Uneven Skin Texture Dullness | <p style="color: #f0e68c; margin: 0;"><i>skin type:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acne-Prone Oily Aging Sensitive |
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When to Use:

- A.M. or P.M.
- Plays well with other actives

Read the Label:

(as seen on the ingredient list)

Curcuma Longa (Turmeric) Root Extract

In skincare, the majority of research into turmeric has been focused on curcumin. What we know so far is that the active has a lot of 'anti' benefits. It's an antioxidant that has anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties. You can blame inflammation for skin concerns like acne, eczema, and rosacea, but, because turmeric inhibits the production of pro-inflammatory genes, it can be a helpful antidote. "Those suffering from acne also benefit from its antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties to calm skin down and resolve the after-breakout pigmentation that often lingers," Absher explains. "Those with eczema and psoriasis can also benefit from its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties to clearer skin."

But that's not all. It's also been shown to soothe irritation, promote wound healing, and even boost the skin's natural hyaluronic acid reserves. "It promotes healthy circulation, rejuvenates dull and dry skin, and helps make skin radiant and glowing," Roy shares.

The antioxidant benefits of turmeric complement the anti-inflammatory ones. “Due to its antioxidant effects, it helps reduce oxidative stress,” Dr. Boakye shares. The oxidative stress caused by free radical damage impacts skin tone, texture, and quality. “Oxidative stress is one of the key factors leading to skin aging and thanks to the presence of turmerones,” says Megan Douglas, founder of The Organic Skin Co. Using a CO2 extraction method, her line is able to better capture “the plant’s antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anti-aging benefits.” Turmeric, in particular, is “rich in compounds like turmerones and curcuminoids,” she says, adding that “turmeric CO2 can help improve radiance and evenness of skin tone, while also reducing the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles.”

Because turmeric is “an antioxidant powerhouse with anti-inflammatory properties,” Absher says “a much-appreciated benefit is its ability to brighten and even skin tone” – including dark circles and other hyperpigmentation. “We know antioxidants protect our skin from the effects of free radical damage the same way antioxidants protect our whole body from the process, which makes turmeric a great anti-aging ingredient as well,” she notes.

THE BENEFITS OF TURMERIC IN HAIR CARE

It’s not just your skin that can benefit from turmeric – you’ll notice a difference in your strands, too. From hair oils to conditioners, this ‘queen of all spices’ is also a hero ingredient in hair care. “Specifically for hair, it provides a glossy shine and nourishment,” explain Akash and Nikita Mehta, the founders of Fable & Mane. “If you’re experiencing hair loss, it’s a great way to inhibit inflammation of the scalp to help create a healthy scalp and prevent hair loss.”

The brother-sister duo formulated the Fable & Mane HoliRoots Conditioner with turmeric for its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant benefits that support optimal hair health. “We call it out as a ‘hero ingredient’ because it provides so many benefits from head to toe,” they say. A combination of oral and topical turmeric can go a long way towards more luscious locks. “I ingest curcumin capsules every day and it really helps with my hair and nail growth,” Nikita notes.

The Best Candidates for Topical Turmeric

“I believe that all skin types can benefit from turmeric,” Dr. Boakye says. “It has been used in the cosmetic industry and also in the pharmaceutical industry to assist with inflammation.” Those experiencing inflammatory skin conditions like acne, rosacea, or eczema can benefit from the botanical’s anti-inflammatory effects, though the antioxidant properties mean that anyone concerned about uneven skin tone and texture or looking for a glow-up will appreciate the multifaceted nature of the spice.

We probably don’t need to tell you that turmeric has a bold color and scent. In most commercially formulated beauty products, these factors don’t really come into play, but, if you are trying a DIY turmeric mask or spot treatment, you’ll want to be mindful. “The staining of the

skin and odor are big deterrents,” Dr. Boakye cautions. “Due to the yellow-orange color – which comes from curcumin – [turmeric] can possibly stain the skin.”

Because curcumin is oil soluble, an oil cleanser or makeup remover should do the trick to fade it. Even so, it’s not necessarily ideal. “The process of removing the stain on your skin can negate some of the calming benefits in the first place,” Absher shares. If you are committed to using turmeric for at-home treatments, she recommends using Kasturi turmeric (a.k.a. curcuma aromatica or wild turmeric). It does not stain the skin and is also not edible.

If you know you have skin sensitivities or allergies, take it slow. “Turmeric is a wonderful ingredient that I don’t attribute any negative qualities to at all,” Absher says. “Of course, there are always the few that may be allergic to it and not know it, so before applying anything topically – not just turmeric – it is always best to do the patch skin test.” This is especially important for at-home remedies.

How to Find the Right Turmeric Product

Turmeric plays well with others, which makes it easy to incorporate into just about any routine. It can be paired with fellow antioxidant and anti-inflammatory ingredients or with exfoliating actives such as alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) and beta hydroxy acids (BHAs). As a result, you’ll find turmeric in cleansers, masks, serums, oils, and spot treatments. It can be used in your A.M. or P.M. routine, though its antioxidant properties are ideal for daytime and layering under sunscreen. When choosing a turmeric product, it’s best to consider your skin concern (think: acne, pigmentation, dullness, etc.) and go from there.

CLEANSERS

In the Tracie Martyn Amla Purifying Cleanser, Morariu says “there is a wonderful modulating effect between the soothing action of turmeric and the active – exfoliating alpha and beta hydroxy acids – as well as a great synergy in regards to anti-bacterial action with salicylic acid and in regards to brightening action with vitamin C and lactic acid (used for hyperpigmentation).”

Other formulas to consider include the Farmacy Green Clean Makeup Meltaway Cleansing Balm, which pairs sunflower and ginger root oils and papaya enzymes with turmeric and mooring extract to remove impurities without stripping the skin, and the Odacité Blue Aura Cleansing Water that marries the principles of French pharmacy-favorite micellar water with the clarifying and age-defying benefits of Ayurvedic herbs (specifically, neem, holy basil, and, yes, turmeric).

SERUMS & OILS

The Andalou Naturals Turmeric Enlighten Serum is all about glow thanks to a blend of fruit stem cells, turmeric, vitamin C, hyaluronic acid, and magnesium ascorbyl phosphate. The Clarins

Double Serum is an icon in its own right, so it's only fitting that it includes 21 iconic botanicals, including turmeric, to boost radiance and visibly firm and smooth the skin.

For those wanting a face oil, The Organic Skin Co Good Oil is formulated with the brand's Turmeric CO2, plus calendula to calm the skin and rosemary to address fine lines. "Turmeric CO2 extracts are notable for the fact that they retain most of the skin-loving phytonutrients of the plant, including its essential oils and resins," Douglas notes. An editor-favorite is the Sunday Riley C.E.O. Glow Vitamin C and Turmeric Face Oil, which, as its name suggests, brings together the potent antioxidants to protect against sun damage and environmental aggressors while improving skin tone and texture.

MOISTURIZER

On the moisturizer front, the refillable Kora Organics Turmeric Glow Moisturizer combines a custom liposomal encapsulation of turmeric with marine algae and desert date, rosehip, and maracuja oils to plump, hydrate, and tone the complexion. The Sweet Chef Turmeric + Vitamin C Booster Eye Cream, meanwhile, is gentle and lightweight enough for the delicate skin around the eyes — but it still packs a potent punch with turmeric, ginger, vitamin C, and niacinamide to brighten dark circles and strengthen the skin barrier.

TREATMENTS

Turmeric is a frequent addition to treatment masks and exfoliating peels thanks to its anti-inflammatory *and* brightening benefits. The AAVRANI Glow Activating Exfoliator is a dual-purpose clay mask and cleanser that features honey, neem, and turmeric to gently exfoliate and brighten. A word of warning when using exfoliants: "While the product is gentle enough to be used daily, we don't believe in making the skin too dependent on products," Roy notes. "Over-exfoliating trains the skin to rely on external products to boost cell turnover and shed dead skin cells."

The Kiehl's Turmeric & Cranberry Seed Energizing Radiance Masque acts as both a chemical and physical exfoliator. Antioxidant-rich cranberry and turmeric help to brighten the skin over time, while cranberry seeds manually slough away dead skin cells for an instant radiance boost. If you have combination, oily, or acne-prone skin, the UMA Deeply Clarifying Face Mask is for you. This creamy concoction relies on natural agents like turmeric, clove, and neem to destroy pore-clogging and breakout-inducing bacteria, while fuller's earth clay, honey, and lemon soothe active acne and balance oil production for a clearer complexion.

HAIR CARE

In addition to the topical formulation of turmeric in the brand's HoliRoots hair care collection, the Fable & Mane Tiger Tea is a flavorful addition to any hair and wellness routine. Inspired by the Mehta's grandma's golden milk recipe, it's a yummy blend of turmeric, ashwagandha, zinc,

biotin, and vitamin B12 for a healthier looking 'do. It's so good, in fact, that it made our list of top hair supplements.

The Takeaway

From its healing medicinal properties to its glow-inducing beauty benefits, there isn't much turmeric can't do. Further research will be needed to fully understand turmeric's golden status for skin, but there is no denying its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, anti-microbial, and soothing properties will boost just about any skincare routine.

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