

The effects of turmeric therapy on cerebral malaria studied

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A Centenary researcher is off to New Delhi to study the impact on cerebral malaria of the major ingredient of turmeric, curcumin.

Dr Saparna Pai has been awarded an Australian Academy of Science Early-Career Australia-India Fellowship to investigate curcumin's action on [immune cells](#) during [malaria infection](#). The Fellowships were announced by the Academy during the visit to India of the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard.

"It has long been known in India that curcumin is useful in treating malaria," says Dr Pai, a post-doctoral fellow in Professor Wolfgang Weninger's Immune Imaging laboratory at the Centenary Institute and the Dermatology Research Foundation at the University of Sydney.

Researchers from the prestigious Indian Institute of Science—where Dr Pai undertook [postgraduate training](#)— have shown that curcumin literally switches off the clinical effects of the disease in mice.

Dr Pai will be working with Professor Virander Chauhan, who leads the highly-regarded Malaria Research Group (MRG) at the International Centre for [Genetic Engineering](#) and Biotechnology, which he also heads. She hopes the collaboration can make progress in determining how curcumin counters malaria by bringing the MRG's knowledge and experience of the disease together with the immunological expertise of the Centenary Institute. They will be studying the interaction of curcumin with molecular signalling compounds. In the long term, says

Dr Pai, the project could contribute to the development of a vaccine.

Well over 200 million people worldwide are infected with malaria, and more than 650,000 die of the disease each year, mainly children. The victims are predominantly from Africa, but also commonly from Asia, including India. [Cerebral malaria](#) occurs when malaria spreads to the brain, usually in children under five. Eventually this leads to complications with the brain's [blood supply](#) which causes the child to slip into a coma and die.

Sixteen young researchers from across Australia received Early-Career Australia-India Fellowships, that support stays of between three and 12 months in India, while 33 senior scientists have been awarded Senior Visiting Fellowships, which support shorter visits of up to two weeks.

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