

Synergistic Effects of Curcumin with Other Polyphenols on Gut Microbiome

Nur Farah Najwa Sharul Basri^a & Syed Abdul Illah Alyahya Syed Abd Kadir^{b*}

Structured Abstract

Background: Curcumin, the principal bioactive compound in turmeric, possesses well-documented antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and prebiotic properties. Despite its therapeutic potential, clinical applications are limited by poor bioavailability and rapid systemic metabolism. Recent evidence has suggested that combining curcumin with complementary polyphenols can significantly enhance its pharmacokinetic profile and biological activity. This review has systematically evaluated the synergistic mechanisms by which these combinations modulate gut microbiome composition and function, while addressing critical gaps in current understanding of these interactions.

Methods: A comprehensive literature search was conducted across PubMed, Google Scholar, and Web of Science databases, encompassing peer-reviewed studies published through 2025. Search terms included "curcumin," "polyphenols," "gut microbiota," "synergistic effects," and "bioavailability enhancement." Inclusion criteria prioritized studies with: (1) direct comparisons between curcumin monotherapy and combination approaches, (2) quantitative microbiome analysis, and (3) mechanistic investigations of functional pathways. Both in vitro and in vivo studies were considered, with particular emphasis on controlled intervention trials.

Results: The analyzed studies demonstrated that curcumin-polyphenol combinations exert multifaceted effects on gut ecosystem dynamics. Key findings include: (1) significant increases in microbial alpha diversity (69% increase in species observed), (2) selective enrichment of beneficial taxa and (3) suppression of pathogenic organisms. At the functional level, these combinations enhanced SCFA production by 2-3-fold, improved bile acid metabolism, and strengthened intestinal barrier integrity through tight junction protein modulation. Nano-formulation strategies increased curcumin bioavailability by up to 2000% when co-administered with piperine, while EGCG-curcumin complexes demonstrated 87.3% improved bioaccessibility.

Conclusion: The synergistic interplay between curcumin and polyphenols represents a promising therapeutic paradigm for gut microbiome modulation, with potential applications in metabolic, inflammatory, and neurological disorders. However, translation to clinical practice requires resolution of several challenges. Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies to assess sustained effects and investigate personalized approaches based on individual microbiome profiles.

Keywords: Curcumin, Polyphenols, Gut Microbiome, Synergistic Effects, Bioavailability Enhancement, Microbial Modulation

*Correspondence: illah.alyahya@uitm.edu.my

^a School of Chemistry & Environment, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia

^b Centre of Foundation Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Dengkil, Malaysia