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Patients with refractory Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis respond to dehydroepiandrosterone: a pilot study

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Abstract

Background: Dehydroepiandrosterone is a steroid hormone used as an 'over-the-counter' drug in the USA. Treatment with dehydroepiandrosterone was effective in randomized controlled trials in patients with systemic lupus erythematosus. Dehydroepiandrosterone sulphate concentrations are decreased in patients with inflammatory bowel disease. Dehydroepiandrosterone inhibits nuclear factor-kappaB and the secretion of interleukin-6 and interleukin-12 via the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor alpha.

Aim: A phase II pilot trial was started to evaluate the effect of dehydroepiandrosterone in active inflammatory bowel disease.

Methods: Twenty patients with chronic active inflammatory bowel disease [seven Crohn's disease (Crohn's disease activity index, 242 +/- 51; mean +/- s.d.); 13 ulcerative colitis (clinical activity index, 7.8 +/- 2.1)] took 200 mg dehydroepiandrosterone per day orally for 56 days.

Results: Six of the seven patients with Crohn's disease and eight of the 13 patients with ulcerative colitis responded to treatment, with a decrease in the Crohn's disease activity index of > 70 points and a decrease in the clinical activity index of > 4 points, respectively. Six Crohn's disease patients and six ulcerative colitis patients went into remission (Crohn's disease activity index < 150; clinical activity index <= 4). No patient withdrew from the study because of side-effects.

Conclusions: In a pilot study, dehydroepiandrosterone was effective and safe in patients with refractory Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis. Adjustment of the dehydroepiandrosterone dosage may further improve the treatment success.

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