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IV Vitamin C Boosts Chemo's Cancer-Fighting Power?

Lab study found it also left healthy cells unharmed, but experts say more research needed

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WebMD News from HealthDay

By Dennis Thompson

HealthDay Reporter

WEDNESDAY, Feb. 5, 2014 (HealthDay News) -- Large doses of intravenous vitamin C have the potential boost chemotherapy's ability to kill cancer cells, according to new laboratory research involving human cells and mice.

Vitamin C delivered directly to human and mouse ovarian cancer cells helped kill off those cells while leaving normal cells unharmed, University of Kansas researchers report.

"In cell tissue and animal models of cancer, we saw when you add IV vitamin C it seems to augment the killing effect of chemotherapy drugs on cancer cells," said study co-author Dr. Jeanne Drisko, director of integrative medicine at the University of Kansas Medical Center.

In follow-up human trials, a handful of cervical cancer patients given intravenous vitamin C along with the chemotherapy reported fewer toxic side effects from their cancer treatment, according to the study published in the Feb. 5 issue of *Science Translational Medicine*.

"In those patients, we didn't see any ill effects and we noticed they had fewer effects from the chemotherapy," Drisko said. "It seemed to be protecting the healthy cells while killing the cancer cells."

Intravenous vitamin C has been considered an integrative medical therapy for cancer since the 1970s, Drisko noted.

But vitamin C's cancer-killing potential hasn't been taken seriously by mainstream medicine ever since clinical trials performed by the Mayo Clinic with oral vitamin C in the late 1970s and early 1980s found no anti-cancer effects, she explained.

Researchers have since argued that those trials were flawed because vitamin C taken orally is absorbed by the gut and excreted by the kidneys before its levels can build up in the bloodstream.

But it's been hard to attract funding for further research. There's no reason for pharmaceutical companies to fund vitamin C research, and federal officials have been uninterested in plowing research dollars into the effort since the Mayo research was published, Drisko said.

This latest investigation began with researchers exposing human ovarian cancer cells to vitamin C in the lab. They found that the cells suffered DNA damage and died off, while normal cells were left unharmed.

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