Could Grape Seed Extract Be an Alternative Treatment in the Management of Hot Flashes?

To the Editor I congratulate Dr Gupta on his clearly communicated Patient Page1 on management of hormone therapy-related hot flashes. He noted that safety and effectiveness information is lacking for herbal products, soy, and acupuncture. However, in common practice, grape seed extract is used as an herbal product that may alleviate hot flashes. Thus far, only 1 study in the literature may support use of grape seed extract in the management of hot flashes. In this randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study, women taking grape seed extract with concentrated amounts of the polyphenol antioxidant proanthocyanidin showed improved menopausal symptoms (including hot flashes, anxiety, and insomnia).2

However, more studies are needed to confirm its use as an alternative treatment for hormone therapy-related hot flashes.

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Published Online: June 21, 2018. doi:10.1001/jamaoncol.2018.1090

Conflict of Interest Disclosures: None reported.


In Reply Dr Altundag notes that a randomized, placebo-controlled trial by Terauchi et al1 showed improvement in menopausal symptoms, including hot flashes, in women taking grape seed proanthocyanidin extract. Similar proanthocyanidin-rich pine bark extracts have also been shown to alleviate menopausal symptoms.1 Of note, these studies did not specifically include breast cancer survivors, or patients with hormone therapy-associated hot flashes. Proanthocyanidins possess aromatase inhibitor activity both in vitro and in vivo,2 and exert antiestrogenic activity in vitro in the presence of estradiol.3 Their mechanism of action of ameliorating hot flashes is unclear given this antiestrogenic biochemical activity, although they may not affect actual estrogen levels.4 They have also been shown to bind to the estrogen receptor-α with weak agonist activity.3

An apprehension of using certain plant compounds such as phytoestrogens to treat hormone therapy-associated hot flashes is the concern that they act as selective estrogen receptor modulators with agonist effects on breast cancer cells. Given this, and their relative lack of efficacy, the Comité de l'évolution des pratiques en oncologie (CEPO) does not recommend use of phytoestrogens to treat hot flashes in breast cancer survivors (grade A recommendation).5 Although data supporting the use of grape seed proanthocyanidin extract for menopausal hot flashes are encouraging, we agree with Dr Altundag that further study is required before it is routinely recommended to treat hormone therapy-related hot flashes given the availability of alternative treatments and lack of safety data in this population.

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Published Online: June 21, 2018. doi:10.1001/jamaoncol.2018.1108

Conflict of Interest Disclosures: None reported.


CORRECTION

Error in Figure Label and Caption: In the Original Investigation titled “Hormone Replacement Therapy After Oophorectomy and Breast Cancer Risk Among BRCA1 Mutation Carriers,”1 published online April 19, 2018, there was an error in the Figure caption. Where it previously read “A, Breast cancer incidence among BRCA1 mutation carriers who used estrogen-alone HRT compared with women who did not use HRT” it now correctly reads “A, Breast cancer incidence among BRCA1 mutation carriers who used any HRT compared with women who did not use HRT.” The panel label for part A of the Figure was also corrected. This article was corrected online.