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Cancer Center

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FOR THE MEDIA

Vinpocetine may be useful against some cerebrovascular disorders, but additional studies are needed.

Vinpocetine is made from a compound found in the common periwinkle plant. It was developed in Europe as a drug but is sold in the United States as a dietary supplement to improve brain function.

Vinpocetine may increase blood flow to the brain and has been studied as a treatment for Alzheimer's disease and for disorders of the nervous and circulatory systems. However, more studies are needed before it can be recommended.

Vinpocetine should not be confused with the chemotherapy drugs vincristine and vinblastine, which are also made from compounds of the periwinkle plant.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

- Alzheimer's disease

Small studies suggest benefit, but well-designed clinical trials are needed.

- Cognitive decline

Vinpocetine may improve cognitive decline, but more studies are needed.

- Dementia

A systematic review did not find benefit with vinpocetine for dementia.

- Memory loss

A few clinical trials have shown benefit. Large-scale studies are needed.

- Stroke

Some studies suggest benefits in stroke patients, but larger studies are needed.

- Cancer treatment

Lab studies suggest some anticancer and increased radiation effects on tumor cells, but this has not been studied in humans.

What are the side effects?

- Flushing, rashes, gastrointestinal problems
- Low blood pressure
- Decreased white blood cell count

In a small study, jitters, increased heart rate, and insomnia were possibly related.

Case reports

- Skin reaction, rapid heartbeat, stomach ache: In a man who took a supplement containing *Ginkgo biloba* and vinpocetine. However, it is uncertain whether both ingredients contributed equally to these reactions.
- Low white blood cell counts : In a 73-year-old man after using vinpocetine for 50 days. His symptoms resolved after product discontinuation.

What else do I need to know?

Patient Warnings:

- A report from the National Toxicology Program of the National Institutes of Health suggests this supplement may cause harm to pregnant women or the fetus. In supplement labeling, vinpocetine may also be called periwinkle or vinca minor extract.
- Patients with low blood pressure, a history of heart problems or strokes, or those on cardiovascular medications should consult their physician before using this product.

Do Not Take if:

- You are pregnant: A report from the National Toxicology Program of the National Institutes of Health suggests this supplement may cause harm to pregnant women or the fetus. In supplement labeling, vinpocetine may also be called periwinkle or vinca minor extract.
- You are using blood-thinning drugs: Vinpocetine may increase their effects.
- You are taking medication to lower high blood pressure : Vinpocetine may enhance their effects.
- You are taking P-glycoprotein substrate drugs: Lab studies suggest that vinpocetine may alter the way these drugs work in the body. Clinical relevance is not yet known.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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