

Ginger relieves chemo-related nausea

Up to 70% of cancer patients suffer from chemo-related nausea, in spite of receiving anti-nausea medications from their doctors. Ginger is a traditional nausea remedy, and some preliminary studies indicated it might relieve chemo-related nausea. A large study headed by the University of Rochester was reported recently at the American Society of Clinical Oncology meetings. This study included 644 patients receiving chemotherapy, mostly for breast, GI and lung cancers. All patients received standard anti-nausea drugs like Zofran or Kytril with their chemo, but in addition, they got either placebo (dummy) capsules, or capsules with 0.5 grams, 1 gram or 1.5 grams of ginger. The study assessed nausea using a 7-point scale during the first day of the patients' 2nd and 3rd chemo cycles. All doses of ginger relieved nausea significantly better than placebo; the most effective doses were 0.5 and 1 grams per day. Because of the large size and good design of this study, we can thus reliably say that ginger is a potential nausea remedy for chemo patients.

This is a very relevant study for patient care. Doses of half a gram to a gram daily of ginger are quite small, which makes it easy to add to a patient's regimen. There has been some concern that the possible anticoagulant effect of ginger could be a problem for chemo patients, who may have too few blood platelets for normal clotting. With a dose this small, the likelihood that anticoagulant effects could be a problem decreases: studies with two grams of ginger daily have not found anticoagulant effects. At the Block Center we have frequently recommended ginger for patients having problems with nausea, especially if they did not have low platelet levels. We are thus very happy to see this large study, which validates what we and others have observed. While there are some newer anti-nausea drugs that are more powerful than the anti-nausea drugs taken by patients in these trials, these can be very expensive and are not available at some centers (we do use these at the Block Center). It looks like ginger offers a low-cost alternative to these expensive new drugs that may help many patients get adequate nausea relief at a cost that is more bearable for the health care system.

Ryan JL et al. Ginger for chemotherapy-related nausea in cancer patients: a URCC CCOP randomized, double-blind placebo-controlled clinical trial of 644 cancer patients. Presented at: American Society of Clinical Oncology Annual Meeting, May 30, 2009. *J Clin Oncol.* 27:15s, 2009 (suppl; Abstr 9511)

To summarize: A large randomized study found that doses of half a gram to a gram of ginger daily could help relieve nausea in patients going through chemotherapy.