DHEA Alleviates Symptoms of Midlife Depression

DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone) may be useful in treating major and minor midlife depression, according to a report from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in Bethesda, MD.*

DHEA, an adrenal hormone, is a precursor of estrogen and testosterone. Diminished levels of DHEA have been associated with aging and depression.

The NIMH study enrolled 46 men and women, aged 45-65, who had either major or minor depression of moderate severity. In this double-blind, placebo-controlled, crossover study, participants were randomly assigned to receive either six weeks of DHEA therapy, three weeks each of two dosages of DHEA, or six weeks of placebo. After a one- to two-week period of no therapy, the groups were then switched. The subjects were evaluated at three and six weeks during the treatment phases using standard tests for depression and sexual function.

Six weeks of DHEA treatment was associated with significant improvements in measures of depression and sexual function.

Half of the participants experienced a 50% or greater reduction in baseline scores on a depression rating scale.

DHEA is available as a dietary supplement in the US. Optimizing DHEA levels in adults has been associated with numerous benefits, including improved immune function, balanced hormones, and healthy weight. The NIMH findings suggest an additional role for DHEA in the management of midlife depression.

—Elizabeth Wagner, ND

Reference
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