DHEA Shown to Boost Brain Cell Growth

Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) is one of the most active and plentiful circulating hormones in both men and women. DHEA levels peak, however, around the age of 30, then decline by as much as 80% by the age of 80. As a result, many anti-aging researchers recommend supplemental DHEA as a way to forestall many of the deleterious effects of aging, such as decreased libido, muscle mass, and brain function.

A newly published study sheds light on how DHEA may increase brain function. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin found that DHEA boosts brain cell growth.* When DHEA was added to human neural stem cells, these embryonic brain cells showed a remarkable increase in their growth rate. These findings, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences USA, offer the first direct proof of DHEA's beneficial effect on human brain cells.

Study director Dr. Clive Svendsen and his colleagues grew human neural stem cells in culture and then exposed the cells to either a mixture of DHEA, growth factors, and inhibitory factors or a mixture of the growth and inhibitory factors minus DHEA. The cells exposed to the mixture containing DHEA demonstrated a 29% increase in new brain cells compared to the mixture without DHEA.

The researchers noted that DHEA was the only hormone tested that had such a direct effect on neural stem cell growth and new neuron formation. Since adult human brains have neural stem cells that continue to make new neurons in some parts of the brain, this study may point to one way in which DHEA works as anti-aging supplement.

—Edward R. Rosick, DO, MPH, MS

Reference

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