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Title-> Substance boosts therapeutic effects of AZT. (Texas A&M
University) (Carbohydrate compound purified from aloe vera
plant) (Information Briefs From Worldwide Sources)

Subject Hd->Aloe barbadensis_Therapeutic use
Zidovudine_Physiological aspects

Article #-> 11079724

DATELINE: Texas A&M University

A team of scientists from Texas A&M University, College Station,

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Texas, and three other institutions says that a complex carbohydrate compound purified from the green, spiky aloe vera plant appears to help drugs such as azidothymidine (AZT) and acyclovir (ACY) block the pathology associated with HIV and herpes simplex virus (HSV).

They also found that the compound, acemannan, (Carrisyn, Carrington Laboratories, Dallas, Texas) interfered with HIV's ability to reproduce in infected cells.

"It's not going to be a magic bullet against AIDS," cautions Dr. Maurice C. Kemp, a virologist in Texas A&M's College of Veterinary Medicine. "There aren't many magic bullets out there. But as an adjunctive therapy, it looks like it can be used in combination with other therapies."

The scientists' findings are published in the July, 1991, issue of the new journal Molecular Biotherapy with additional results scheduled to be published in the September, 1991, issue.

Evidence that acemannan may boost treatment of AIDS is the latest report of the plant's medicinal powers. Sap squeezed from the fleshy

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leaves of the cactus-like plant has been used for hundreds of years to help heal minor burns and abrasions. Many health food stores sell aloe vera-based tonics and cosmetics.

However, the use of acemannan in treating HIV infections has not been widely accepted by AIDS researchers.

The Texas A&M researchers are working with scientists from the Southern Research Institute in Birmingham, Alabama, DFW Medical Center in Grand Prairie, Texas, and Irving, Texas-based Carrington Laboratories to test acemannan in AIDS treatment. Carrington is testing acemannan before seeking U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval to market a trademarked version of the compound as a

treatment for AIDS.

Kemp and his colleagues are studying how acemannan affects the immune system's response to viral infection. They are also investigating how acemannan affects the ability of AZT and ACY to block the spread of HIV and HSV.

Kemp's laboratory research uses cultures of cells to study how

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acemannan affects the way viruses attack cells and spread once they have infected them. Other members of the the research team are testing the compound's effect on humans infected with HIV. A related investigational new drug (IND) clinical study with AIDS patients in Canada began in December.

The scientists' research so far suggests that using acemannan might allow doctors to reduce the amount of anti-HIV drugs they prescribe for AIDS patients. Reducing the amount of such drugs needed to be effective against the virus could be important, because drugs like AZT often cause dangerous side effects at normal doses, Kemp says.

He says their findings suggest that perhaps as little as one-tenth the current AZT dose could be used if it is given with acemannan. That would have important benefits for both the safety and cost of AIDS treatments.

"At those levels, toxicity associated with AZT is eliminated, and we don't get toxicity from acemannan anyway," he said. "If we drop the AZT dosage to 50 milligrams per day from the current 500 milligrams, the cost would drop significantly.

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"You'd still have the cost of acemannan therapy on top of that, but the costs aren't going to be anywhere near the cost of AZT alone and its associated toxicity."

Kemp also is studying how acemannan affects viruses that cause herpes simplex, Newcastle disease and several other diseases that affect humans and animals.

A number of major aloe vera-growing operations are located in the lower Rio Grande Valley region of Texas.

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Article Citations

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