

Double-Blind Treatment of Major Depression With Dehydroepiandrosterone

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Objective: This study was designed to assess possible antidepressant effects of dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), an abundant adrenocortical hormone in humans.

Method: Twenty-two patients with major depression, either medication-free or on stabilized antidepressant regimens, received either DHEA (maximum dose=90 mg/day) or placebo for 6 weeks in a double-blind manner and were rated at baseline and at the end of the 6 weeks with the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale. Patients previously stabilized with antidepressants had the study medication added to that regimen; others received DHEA or placebo alone.

Results: DHEA was associated with a significantly greater decrease in Hamilton depression scale ratings than was placebo. Five of the 11 patients treated with DHEA, compared with none of the 11 given placebo, showed a 50% decrease or greater in depressive symptoms.

Conclusions: These results suggest that DHEA treatment may have significant antidepressant effects in some patients with major depression. Further, larger-scale trials are warranted.

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