Scientists to Study Berries, Oral Cancer

Scientists to Test Black Raspberry's Use in Preventing or Fighting Oral Cancer

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Apr. 11, 2005 - University of Kentucky and Ohio State researchers are conducting a test to see if a common fruit is useful in slowing or preventing oral cancer. Scientists believe the black raspberry carries two acids that can inhibit tumor growth.

The researchers will put the theory to the test this summer in a trial at Ohio State by using a gel made from freeze-dried black raspberries.

"Obviously we'd like to see these lesions completely disappear, but I think everyone would be happy just to see the whole process slowing down," said Russell Mumper, an associate professor of pharmaceutical science at the University of Kentucky who is working on the project. "Ninety-nine percent or more of these lesions will advance to cancer."

Oral cancer, which causes up to 8,000 deaths nationally each year, is generally associated with alcohol and tobacco use.

The idea for a raspberry-based medication was conceived by doctors at Ohio State's Comprehensive Cancer Center in Columbus. The raspberry gel was then developed by Mumper, the associate director at UK's Center for Pharmaceutical Science & Technology.

"We spent about six months developing various kinds of raspberry gels before we came up with the current version, which looks promising," Mumper said.

Natural foods advocates have touted the healthful benefits of raspberries for years. The trial at Ohio State is apparently is one of the first efforts by mainstream medicine to develop a medication from the fruit. The pulp of black raspberries contains two substances anthocyanin and ellagic acid that are thought to have anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, as well as the ability to slow tumor growth.

Ohio State researcher Gary Stoner, who has been studying the anti-cancer properties of raspberries for years, said his group determined that freeze-drying the berries and grounding them into powder increased the concentration of cancer-preventive substances tenfold.

Stoner found that when the powder was fed to test animals, it appeared to inhibit the development of esophageal and colon cancer as well as oral cancers.

In the trial, doctors will give the gel to 20 patients who have precancerous oral lesions and to 10 healthy patients as a control. The patients will apply the gel four times per day for six weeks.

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