

Reversing Aging?

Dr. Dean Kane is studying the effects of growth hormone on the aging process.

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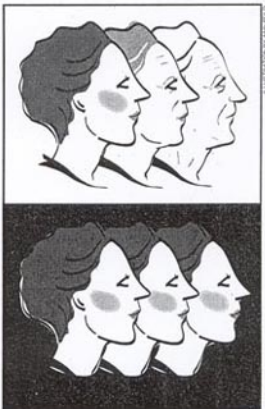
Americans are living longer but not necessarily better. "The disease process starts in our 40s and 50s. What we're seeing now is just a greater period of time in which we can be an invalid" due to poor health, says Dr. Dean Kane, who is participating in a national study on aging.

Researchers have been examining the signs of aging for the past 30 years. Only in the past 10 years, though, have they begun examining the role growth hormones play in reversing these ill effects, according to Dr. Kane, 45, a local physician who is board-certified in both plastic surgery and anti-aging medicine.

In a 1990 study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. Daniel Rudman reported that by replacing growth hormone in men ages 60 to 80, the effects of aging can be reversed by at least 30 years. Those effects include endurance, immunity, body fat, blood pressure, cholesterol, memory, wrinkles, bone density, energy levels and vitality. Similar results from additional studies have been reported in other medical journals.

The pituitary gland in healthy individuals produces growth hormone naturally, says Phyllis Azman, a nurse practitioner and director of Dr. Kane's Anti-Aging Program, part of a five-year-long anti-aging trial study of the growth hormone and its effects on aging.

The anti-aging study began this past January with Dr. C. Randall Harrell, of the Physicians Research and Pharmaceutical Alliance, a private group in Palm Harbor, Fl., as the primary researcher. The alliance received permission to conduct a U.S. Food and Drug Administration-reviewed clinical protocol for what is officially titled "Safety and Efficacy of Long-Term Replacement of Growth Hormone (GH) and Dehydroepiandrosterone



(DHEA) in Subjects with Age-Related Hormone Deficiency."

Dr. Kane learned of the study through his affiliation with the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine. Dr. Kane, the first physician in Baltimore to participate in the study, and Ms. Azman flew to Florida for training.

After the age of about 30, the production of growth hormone begins to decline; after age 60, we have about one-tenth of what we had when we were 20 years old.

"By replacing growth hormone," Ms. Azman claims, "we can reverse - not just halt - the effects of aging."

An individual's level of growth hormone can be stimulated, either by drinking a powdered supplement twice a day (the approved method for men and women who are still able to produce growth hormone on their own), or by a self-administered injection twice a day.

Currently, the FDA only approves growth hormone for children who do not have enough growth hormone of their own and for adults with pituitary gland diseases. The purpose of the anti-aging study is to assess the efficacy and safety of

combined replacement therapy in aging subjects who are hormone deficient. Among specific goals, the study will evaluate whether or not the therapy has sustained or increased physiological performance and quality of life, and has any untoward health effects.

So far, five participants have signed up for the local Anti-Aging Program. Each can expect to pay approximately \$10,000 a year to participate, a fee that is not covered by health insurance. Ms. Azman says the cost is so high because there are only two FDA-approved labs manufacturing the hormone.

A series of tests determine how much hormone each participant gets. Monthly follow-up tests monitor their hormone, vitamin and mineral levels. Participants are taught to inject themselves with the hormone. The hope is that participants will make at least a one-year commitment to the study.

Growth hormone is, in fact, available in health food stores and many body-builders take it in mega-doses, says Dr. Kane, who doesn't consider that a good idea. "Super doses of the hormone have been shown to cause disease, so it's not a good idea to take this on your own" outside of a supervised medical setting such as his program.

Recently, Dr. Kane began taking growth hormone himself. "My levels were low so I'm using this as a booster," said the doctor, who reports feeling more energetic and seeing his hair and nails grow faster.

"But growth hormone is not a fountain of youth," Dr. Kane hastens to add. "This is evidence-based medicine. We're not selling snake oil here." □

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