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DL-phenylalanine markedly potentiates opiate analgesia - an example of nutrient/pharmaceutical up-regulation of the endogenous analgesia system.

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Author information

Abstract

In the author's clinical experience, concurrent treatment with DL-phenylalanine (DLPA) often appears to potentiate pain relief and also ease depression in patients receiving opiates for chronic non-malignant pain. An analysis of this phenomenon suggests that it may be mediated, at least in part, by up-regulation of the 'endogenous analgesia system' (EAS), a neural pathway that projects caudally from medullary nuclei to the dorsal horn of the spinal column; when stimulated by chronic pain or therapeutic measures such as opiates or acupuncture, the EAS suppresses activation of second-order pain-receptive neurons in the dorsal horn, and thereby alleviates pain. Since serotonin and enkephalins are key neurotransmitters in the EAS, it is reasonable to predict that measures which promote serotonin activity (such as 5-hydroxytryptophan and serotonin-reuptake inhibitors) as well as enkephalin activity (such as D-phenylalanine, an enkephalinase inhibitor) should potentiate EAS-mediated analgesia - a view consistent with much previous medical research. Comprehensive support of the EAS with well-tolerated nutrients and pharmaceuticals may amplify the analgesic efficacy of chronic opiate therapy, while enabling dosage reductions that minimize opiate side-effects. Analogously, this approach may complement the efficacy of acupuncture and other analgesic measures that activate the EAS.

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MeSH terms, Substances

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