NUTRITION, GROWTH, AND CANCER

EDITORS: George P. Tryfiates

Kedar N. Prasad



1990年7月24日

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Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Nutrition, Growth, and Cancer held in Athens, Greece, April 26–30, 1987

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ALAN R. LISS, INC. • NEW YORK

Address all Inquiries to the Publisher Alan R. Liss, Inc., 41 East 11th Street, New York, NY 10003

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

International Symposium on Nutrition, Growth, and Cancer (1st: 1987: Athens, Greece)
Nutrition, growth, and cancer.

(Progress in clinical and biological research; v. 259)

"Sponsored by the International Association for Viatmin and Nutritional Oncology and the National Hellenic Research Foundation"—P. facing t.p. Includes index.

1. Cancer—Nutritional aspects—Congresses.
2. Cancer—Prevention—Congresses. 3. Carcinogenesis—Congresses. 4. Human growth—Congresses.
I. Tryfiates, George P. II. Prasad, Kedar N.
III. International Association for Vitamin and Nutritional Oncology. IV. Ethnikon Hidryma Ereunön (Greece)
V. Title. VI. Series. [DNLM: 1. Neoplasms—etiology—congresses. 2. Neoplasms—prevention & control—congresses. 3. Nutrition—congresses. 4. Vitamins—congresses. W1 PR668E v.259 / QZ 200 I61237 1987n]
RC268.45.158 1987 616.99 / 87-29753
ISBN 0-8451-5109-6

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The First International Symposium on Nutrition, Growth, and Cancer was sponsored by the:

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Preface

In recent years the possible role of specific nutrients in modifying the incidence of cancer has been the subject of intense scientific and clinical research efforts. At present the major research focus is on mechanisms of carcinogenesis and their modifications by nutrients, as well as on human epidemiology and intervention studies. The involvement of specific nutrients in the regulation of oncogene expression has just begun. An International Symposium on Nutrition, Growth, and Cancer, was organized in Athens, Greece, to discuss recent advances in nutrition and cancer research, with special emphasis on mechanistic studies. A large number of international scientists from various disciplines, including cell biology, biochemistry, nutrition, oncology, epidemiology, and public health, reviewed and discussed their most recent results. The positive interaction among these individual scientists provided new stimuli for further investigations into the relationship between nutrition and cancer.

The following topics were discussed in detail: a) effect of retinoids, beta-carotene, vitamin E, vitamin C, and vitamin D on cellular and molecular levels; b) mechanisms of carcinogenesis; c) prevention of cancer by retinoids, beta-carotene, vitamin E, and vitamin C; d) effect of fatty acids on proliferation of normal and transformed cells; e) epidemiological study; f) dietary modification of cancer incidence; g) clinical studies with retinoids and beta-carotene.

This volume provides up-to-date information on nutrition and cancer research and will be a useful reference source for nutritionists, cell biologists, pharmacologists, epidemiologists and oncologists.

The first International Symposium on Nutrition, Growth, and Cancer, was sponsored by International Association for Vitamins and Nutritional Oncology and the National Hellenic Foundation of Greece. This conference was supported by American International Hospital, Samuel Freeman Charitable Trust, Henkel Corporation, Livingston Clinic, Eastman Chemicals (Kodak), Hoffman-La Roche & Co., Twin Lab., J.J. Carlson Lab., International Life Sciences Institute, and BASF.

George P. Tryfiates Kedar N. Prasad August 1987

Present and Future Perspectives

It has been estimated that 75–80 percent of human cancers are caused by environmental agents, and 30–35 percent of these are thought to result from diet alone. Therefore, human cancer is a preventable disease.

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During the last five years, rapid progress has been made in determining the role of specific dietary factors in the regulation of growth, differentiation, and transformation of mammalian cells. Through in vitro and animal experiments, dietary factors that increase the risk of cancer have been identified. Some of those factors are an integral part of the diet, some are additives, and others are formed after ingestion. Among the dietary factors that increase the risk of cancer are fat, high caloric intake, and food containing high levels of nitrites. Dietary factors that may reduce the risk of cancer include vitamins A, C, D, and E, beta-carotene, folic acid, and the mineral selenium. Most of the human epidemiological studies on nutrition and cancer have confirmed animal experiments conducted in vitro and in vivo, which suggest that the levels of vitamins A, C, and E are inversely related to the risk of cancer. These results have led to intervention studies in humans in which the effects of nutrients on cancer risk among high risk populations are being evaluated. Over 30 such intervention studies are in progress.

Human cancer is the result of extracellular, cellular, and host-mediated events. Extracellular events include formation of nitrosamine from nitrite and tertiary amines at acid pH in the stomach, formation of nitramine from inhaled nitrous oxides, production of tertiary amines at neutral pH in the lung and possibly other organs, and the formation of fecal mutagens from a variety of food substances, especially meat. These extracellular events may be more important for some tumors than others. Alpha tocopherol and vitamin C prevent the formation of nitrosamine and nitramines and reduce the level of fecal mutagens.

The cellular events of carcinogenesis involve multiple steps including tumor initiation and promotion phases. The molecular events of carcinogenesis are associated with activation of multiple oncogenes, some of which confer immortalization (eg, activation of c-myc in NIH 3T3 fibroblasts) while others induce transformation (eg, H-ras in NIH 3T3 fibroblasts). In addition, the activation of some oncogenes is associated with the progression of certain tumors (eg, N-myc in human neuroblastoma). Recent studies suggest that vitamins A, C, D, and E affect the process of carcinogenesis on both the cellular and the molecular levels. For example, vitamins A, C, and E block the action of tumor promoters and initiators. These vitamins as well as vitamin D, induce cell differentiation in newly transformed and established tumor cells in culture. Vitamins A, D, and E also reduce the expression of certain oncogenes (c-myc, H-ras, and N-myc) in some tumor cells in culture. However, the mechanisms of action of vitamins A, C, D, and E in cancer prevention remain poorly defined.

In addition to the extracellular and cellular events of carcinogenesis, cancer risk is also influenced by host-mediated events. These include competency of the immune system, detoxification of toxic chemicals, and metabolic activation of chemical carcinogenesis. Vitamins A, C, and E seem to stimulate cellular immunity, accelerate the detoxification rate of some toxic chemicals, and block the metabolic activation of some chemical carcinogens. Thus, in any strategy for cancer prevention in humans, the extracellular, cellular, molecular, and host-mediated events should be taken into consideration. It is our firm belief that we must know more about the molecular mechanisms of action of vitamins and the interaction of vitamins with other nutrients before we can utilize them in a most effective manner for our health.

Animal studies have convincingly established that the intake of certain supplemental nutrients reduces the risk of cancer induced by a wide range of tumor initiators and promoters, but that an excess of other nutrients enhances cancer risk. Most of the human epidemiological studies have confirmed the animal studies, but others have failed to substantiate the results obtained from animal models. The main reason for this inconsistency is that we have not performed human experiments analogous to those with animals. Such experiments can only be performed during actual intervention studies among populations at high risk of developing cancer. Some such studies are in progress and others are being planned. It could take one, two, or more decades before conclusive results from such studies become available for practical application. It should be pointed out that human intervention investigations are not as simple as they might appear because of great variations in dietary habits, life styles, and attitudes toward the proposed studies. During the last five years remarkable progress has been made in redefining the methodological issues, which may reduce the impact of the confounding factors on data interpretation. Laboratory experiments have given us an adequate biological rationale for using nutrients in human cancer-prevention investigations. In the design of any human intervention study, the issue of methodologies is as important as

the issue of biological considerations for use in chemoprevention. Attempts to refine one at the expense of the other may produce inconsistent results.

In any proposed human clinical investigations, the vitamin type, form, and frequency of intake must be given. Furthermore, it is important to estimate a) nutrient levels on the basis of dietary intake; b) actual levels of vitamins in feces, plasma, and tissues (normal, preneoplastic, and neoplastic tissues when available); and c) monitor the immune competency of the host at least twice a year. In the absence of such a comprehensive effort, results of human intervention studies will be difficult to interpret.

We are very much encouraged by the new mechanistic data on the effects of nutrients in animal and human carcinogenesis from various laboratories around the world. The new tools of cellular and molecular biology are being used more and more to study the mechanisms of action of specific nutrients. The near future promises development of new concepts and the modification of old ones. Laboratory studies indicate that, for the first time, we have some naturally occurring molecules that, if used properly, may markedly reduce the incidence of human cancer. Without doubt there is a long way to go before our goals of reducing cancer incidence and achieving more effective cancer treatments are reached. However, we have made an excellent beginning.

Kedar N. Prasad George P. Tryfiates August 1987

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