

Thalidomide

Thalidomide was banned in the early 1960s after it was found to cause deformed limbs in the children of women who took it early in pregnancy. The drug is now being investigated for use in treating AIDS, tuberculosis, and other illnesses.

Researchers have found that thalidomide can inhibit the growth of HIV in test tubes. Thalidomide works in lab experiments against HIV by suppressing a natural substance produced in the body. The substance is called tumor necrosis factor (TNF), also known as cachectin. TNF is released by white cells during infection and helps fight invading organisms.

In some people with HIV infection, the production of TNF is high. High TNF levels are associated with more rapid progression to AIDS and with the development of HIV related central nervous system disease. Excessive production of TNF over a period of time may lead to weight loss and/or interfere with the ability of the immune system to deal with infections.

In a small trial, treatment with thalidomide was found to help with severe weight loss in people with AIDS. Researchers concluded that thalidomide had a beneficial effect on the symptoms of wasting syndrome but did not improve T4 cell counts or reduce HIV replication in this study.

Trials have also shown that thalidomide can treat mouth ulcers very effectively in people with HIV. The technical name for this condition is aphthous ulcers. Other studies for HIV and related conditions are ongoing.

Side effects of thalidomide include: sleepiness, drowsiness, constipation, skin rash, severe headaches, stomach aches, peripheral neuropathy (numbness and pain in your arms, hands, legs and feet) dizziness and nausea, giddiness or nervousness at higher doses, shivering and buzzing in the ears, depression or mood-swings, a general sense of illness and **severe birth defects** if taken even once during pregnancy.

The drug company that makes thalidomide is Celgene. Their brand is called Thalidomid. Thalidomid is now approved for the treatment of a condition associated with leprosy. For more information Celgene can be reached at (800) 890-4619 x3905.

Thalidomide, which was developed in the 1950s to prevent nausea during pregnancy but was found to produce fetal limb abnormalities, has been found to inhibit replication of the AIDS virus and to heal canker sores in patients with AIDS and other conditions. Thalidomide is used for treatment some symptoms of Hansen's disease, or leprosy.

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