

Dear Editor,

I read Part 1 of your interesting article on "unimportant" molecules. I learned some new things. My take on policosanol is a little different, though. I suspect the positive studies were a fraud perpetrated on us by the Cubans, who wanted to find a way to sell a waste product of the sugar industry to unsuspecting cardiovascular disease-prone Americans. A more gentle review of policosanol, from my textbook, *Nutritional Medicine*, is below.

Regarding the paper you cited on wheat germ and lipid levels, I wouldn't put it past the Russians, either, to publish questionable research. However, since I don't read Russian, I have no way to evaluate the paper.

Sincerely,
Alan Gaby, MD

Policosanol is a mixture of long-chain primary alcohols, originally isolated from sugar cane wax, and also found in beeswax, rice bran, and wheat germ. Several studies found that policosanol was as effective as statin drugs for lowering total-cholesterol and LDL-C levels.^{1,2} However, virtually all of the published research supporting a beneficial effect of policosanol was conducted by a single research group from Cuba or sponsored by a single Cuban company. In contrast, numerous independent studies conducted in the U.S.,^{3,4} Canada,⁵ Netherlands,⁶ Germany,⁷ Italy,^{8,9} and South Africa¹⁰ found that policosanol has no effect on cholesterol levels. The bulk of the evidence indicates that policosanol is not effective, so it not recommended as a treatment for hypercholesterolemia.

Response

Thank you Assistant Editor Alan Gaby for your, as ever, excellent insights and deep understanding of the nutrition research. You bring up a very challenging issue—how do we assess the validity and potential bias of published research? My default had been to only trust research in PubMed and to rely on the data tables, not the conclusions. Unfortunately, I am becoming ever more aware of how the publication process has been corrupted by commercial concerns. This culminated in the editorial I coauthored 2 years ago with Alex Vasquez, DC, ND, DO, "Concerns About The Integrity of The Scientific Research Process-

Focus On Recent Negative Publications Regarding Nutrition, Multivitamins, Fish Oil And Cardiovascular Disease (*IMCJ* 18.1)." We clearly documented how placebo protocols can easily be inappropriately designed to achieve the desired results rather than scientific accuracy. While easy for us to critique the pharmaceutical industry, the old adage about not throwing rocks in a glass house applies to natural products research as well.

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