Role of a low glycemic index diet in the treatment of acne vulgaris

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INTRODUCTION

What is Acne?
Acne vulgaris is the most common skin condition, affecting 85% of young adults ages 12-25 across the globe.

Pathophysiology:
• Increased sebum production
• Release of inflammatory mediators in the skin
• Increased hormones
• Hyperkeratosis
• Colonization by anaerobic Propionibacterium acnes

What is the Glycemic Index?
The glycemic index (GI) is a measure of the blood glucose-raising potential of the carbohydrate content of a food compared to a reference food (usually pure glucose). Carbohydrate-containing foods may be classified as high (≥70), moderate (56-69), or low-GI (≤55) in comparison to pure glucose (GI=100).

Why is this an Important topic?
The incidence of acne vulgaris has been increasing dramatically in Western societies without an explanation. One hypothesis to explain the increased incidence of acne in the United States is the influence of the Western diet on acne proliferation. Available pharmacological treatments for acne all have unpleasant side effects. A low glycemic index diet may be a treatment option with the fewest possible adverse effects and the most benefits for the patient.

CLINICAL QUESTION
Among young adults ages 15-25 years old with acne vulgaris, does following a low glycemic index diet as compared to no dietary changes help in treatment of acne vulgaris?

METHODS
PRISMA Flow Diagram

RESULTS

Study 1: Dietary Glycemic Factors, Insulin Resistance, and Adiponectin Levels in Acne Vulgaris
Objective: The aim of this study was to investigate possible associations among dietary glycemic index, insulin resistance, adiponectin levels, and the glycemic load in the pathogenesis of acne vulgaris.

Result: Cerman et al. discovered that glycemic index and glycemic loads were significantly higher in patients with acne compared to healthy control subjects without acne. This study also showed a positive correlation between acne severity and glycemic index value (p = 0.022).

Critique: The exclusive extension criteria is a strength of the study because it decreases potential confounding factors. A major critique of the study is the study type, cross-sectional.

Study 2: Effects of the Glycemic Index of Carbohydrates on Acne Vulgaris
Objective: To determine if a low-glycemic index diet improves facial acne severity.

Result: Reynolds et al. did not reach statistical significance. This study did not find a relationship between the glycemic index of carbohydrates on acne vulgaris (P=0.244).

Critique: A strength of this study is that it is a randomized control trial. A weakness is the small sample size, use of only male subjects, and subjective acne grading scale.

Study 3: A Low-Glycemic-load Diet Improves Symptoms in Acne Vulgaris Patients: A Randomized Control Trial
Objective: To determine whether a low-glycemic-load diet improves acne lesion counts in young males.

Result: Smith et al. showed a statistically significant decrease in inflammatory lesion counts and total acne lesion counts in the intervention group consuming a low glycemic load diet as compared to the control group (p = 0.03).

Critique: This study was a randomized control trial, which is a major strength. Weaknesses of this study include the small sample size, short time period of the study, presence of multiple confounding factors, and use of only male subjects.

CONCLUSIONS

- Of the studies analyzed, one randomized control trial and one cross-sectional study reached clinical significance suggesting there is a significant relationship between glycemic index and acne vulgaris proliferation.
- Although a low glycemic index diet has not been proven to treat acne, there are no adverse risks associated with the consumption of a low glycemic index diet.
- Benefits of a low glycemic index diet include weight loss and improved insulin sensitivity. Indirect benefits of weight loss include the prevention of chronic illnesses such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and dyslipidemia.
- Further research must be conducted in order to identify low glycemic diet as the variable responsible for improvement of acne versus confounding factors such as weight loss and improved insulin sensitivity.
- Longer duration trials and larger sample sizes are necessary in future studies for more conclusive results.

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