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ABSTRACT

Cancer and Vitamin B17

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Published in September 2019

Laetrile, also called amygdalin or vitamin B17, is a popular alternative for cancer treatment. These treatments contain purified amygdalin which is a compound found naturally in the seeds of many fruits. When it is ingested the body breaks down laetrile into three compounds consisting of hydrogen cyanide, benzaldehyde, and prunasin. Hydrogen cyanide appears to be the primary anticancer ingredient in laetrile. There are four possible theories on how laetrile may fight cancer; two theories state that cancer cells are rich in enzymes that convert laetrile into cyanide. Since cyanide kills cells, this means that cancer cells may break down laetrile and kill the cancerous cells. The third theory suggests that cancer is caused by a deficiency in vitamin B17 (amygdalin). The last theory proposes that hydrogen cyanide, which is made by breaking down laetrile, will make cancer cells more acidic and cause them to die. Some studies were made to determine the effect of Laetrile on cancer. There were two animal studies during which scientists treated a variety of cancers with laetrile alone or combined with an enzyme that helps activate it. In both studies, animals did not show any improvement after being treated with laetrile. In one study, 178 people with cancer were treated with laetrile; however, scientists found that it had no significant effect on cancer. In fact, some people experienced cyanide poisoning. In another other study, six people with cancer were treated with laetrile. Scientists found that laetrile did not help treat cancer, as each individual's cancer continued to spread. Lastly, a few test-tube studies have shown that laetrile may reduce the occurrence of tumors by suppressing genes that help them spread. However, there's no evidence that this same effect will occur in living human bodies.