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To the Editor: In their study evaluating the weight-loss potential of (−)hydroxycitric acid (HCA) derived from Garcinia cambogia, Dr. Heymsfield and colleagues1 cite our HCA work. We wish to give a counterpoint to the conclusion expressed by the authors.

Based on their single clinical study, Heymsfield et al state that "These observations ... do not support a role as currently prescribed for the widely used herb G cambogia as a facilitator of weight loss." Aside from this strong statement, which contradicts the positive results reported in several earlierHCAclinical studies, the design of the trial indicates that the authors took little advantage of previously reported experiences involving HCA.[2-4] In their own preclinical research, they report a prerequisite that suggests for HCA to effectively inhibit fat formation and body weight it needs to be administered with a simple carbohydrate-rich (lipogenic) diet.[5]

The study in question5 coadministered HCA with a highfiber diet. This issue of a carbohydrate-rich diet vs a high-fiber diet was not mentioned by Heymsfield et al. Also lacking was mention of the fact that a high-fiber diet was not advocated in our previous HCA trials.[2-4]

The use of a high-fiber diet in combination with HCA may reduce gastrointestinal absorption of HCA, since high-fiber diets may reduce absorption of many nutrients and micronutrients. This issue becomes critical with HCA because its reported efficacy in inhibiting the intracellular enzyme adenosine triphosphate(ATP)–citrate-lyase depends entirely on the presence of HCA inside the target cell.

The significance of HCA availability in the cytosol of a target cell for inhibiting lipid synthesis or ATP–citrate-lyase was recently confirmed in 2 separate studies performed by Joanne Kelleher, PhD, at George Washington University (oral communication, November 24, 1998) and Joel Melnick, MD, at Northwestern University Medical School.[6] The compound used in both of these studies was the same commercially available HCA used in the study by Heymsfield et al.

In view of the shortcomings of the study discussed above, the statement on HCA's lack of efficacy is unsupported, particularly in the absence of proof that HCA was absorbed from the gastrointestinal tract.

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Disclosure. Sabinsa Corporation is a manufacturer of hydroxycitric acid.

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