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IN BRIEF

Genetic Test for Carbamazepine-Induced Stevens-Johnson Syndrome

Carbamazepine (*Tegretol*, *Carbatrol*, *Equetro*, and others), which is now used to treat not only epilepsy but also trigeminal neuralgia and manic episodes in patients with bipolar disorder,¹ is a known cause of Stevens-Johnson syndrome (SJS). The incidence of carbamazepine-induced SJS in countries with mainly white populations is 1 to 6 per 10,000 new users of the drug, but Asian patients have a 10-fold higher incidence of this reaction. An association has been found between the human leukocyte antigen (HLA)-B*1502 allele and carbamazepine-induced SJS in a Chinese population.² This allele occurs almost exclusively in Asians.^{3,4} The FDA is now recommending that Asian patients be tested for genetic susceptibility to carbamazepine-induced SJS before starting the drug. The genetic test should be available in most clinical chemistry labs.

1. Extended-release carbamazepine (*Equetro*) for bipolar disorder. *Med Lett Drugs Ther* 2005; 47:27.
2. WH Chung et al. Medical genetics: a marker for Stevens-Johnson syndrome. *Nature* 2004; 428:486.
3. C Lonjou et al. A marker for Stevens-Johnson syndrome. . . : ethnicity matters. *Pharmacogenomics J* 2006; 6:265.
4. A Alfirevic et al. HLA-B locus in Caucasian patients with carbamazepine hypersensitivity. *Pharmacogenomics* 2006; 7:813.

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