INTRODUCTION

Post-tonsillectomy hemorrhage is the most significant, potentially life-threatening, complication of tonsillectomy. Investigators have sought predictors in order to anticipate which of the 500,000 patients who undergo tonsillectomy each year in the United States possess a risk for this serious complication. Post-operative hematomas are classified as primary, generally defined as occurring within 24 hours of the initial surgery, or secondary, usually occurring between postoperative days 5-10(1). Primary hemorrhages are principally attributed to surgical technique and tissue trauma during the procedure, whereas secondary hemorrhages are ascribed to other factors, including age and gender of the patient, season, intraoperative injection and topical application of vasoconstrictors. Medications with known antithrombotic properties (e.g., warfarin, heparin, low molecular weight heparin) are routinely discontinued prior to surgery in an effort to minimize bleeding risk. Here we describe a case of atypical secondary post-tonsillectomy hemorrhages attributed to the use of transdermal forskolin, a nutraceutical product marketed for weight loss. This case highlights the necessity for surgeons, anesthesiologists and hematologists to inquire about the use of herbal or "alternative" substances that might affect the coagulant potential of the blood prior to invasive procedures.

CONCLUSIONS

This is the first report in the literature of a healthy patient requiring operative control on two occasions for uncomplicated tonsillectomy while using forskolin. The reported incidence of post-tonsillectomy hemorrhage varies from below 2% to 9%, 4.5% in Blakley’s meta-analysis(2).

Screening laboratory tests can be normal in patients with bleeding disorders as well as in patients taking antithrombotic agents(3) and are poor predictors of post-tonsillectomy hemorrhage(4).

Forskolin causes vasodilatation and a transient decrease in systolic blood pressure while increasing heart rate and respiratory rate(5). A month’s supply is sold for $69.95. The product packaging does not incorporate any warning concerning increased risks of bleeding or the necessity of disclosing the usage of herbal medications to the physician prior to surgery.

Forskolin is marketed as a “safe” alternative to must other weight loss drugs because a 2005 randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study funded by the manufacturer indicated that Jen Fe Next has a negligible effect on heart rate, blood pressure, and respiratory rate(6). A month’s supply is sold for $69.95. The product packaging does not incorporate any warning concerning increased risks of bleeding or the necessity of disclosing the usage of this patch to a physician prior to surgery.

Many herbal supplements and over-the-counter “alternative” medications have been associated with perioperative bleeding(7).

The American Society of Anesthesiologists recommends stopping all herbal medications two weeks prior to any surgical procedure(8).

References