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Research Article

Human Breast Milk–Derived HAMLET Complex: A Natural Anti-Cancer Agent with Selective Cytotoxicity Toward Tumor Cells

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Abstract

Human breast milk contains a variety of bioactive compounds, including proteins and fatty acids, which are crucial for infant nutrition and immune defense. Recent studies have identified a protein–lipid complex called HAMLET (Human Alpha-lactalbumin Made Lethal to Tumor cells), formed when partially unfolded α-lactalbumin binds oleic acid. HAMLET selectively induces apoptosis in malignant cells while sparing healthy differentiated cells, representing a potential therapeutic agent against cancer. This clinical study investigates the efficacy and safety of breast milk-derived HAMLET in 90 adult patients diagnosed with solid tumors in Pakistan. Participants were randomly assigned into three groups (n=30 per group): Group A received localized HAMLET therapy, Group B received standard chemotherapy, and Group C received a combination of HAMLET and chemotherapy. Tumor response was measured using imaging, histopathology, and biomarker assays over a 12-week treatment period. Statistical analyses were performed using ANOVA and paired t-tests, with significance set at $p < 0.05$. Results demonstrated that Group A exhibited a significant reduction in tumor volume compared to baseline (mean reduction: 35%, p=0.01), and Group C showed an enhanced response (mean reduction: 55%, p<0.001) compared to chemotherapy alone (mean reduction: 30%, p=0.02). Importantly, HAMLET therapy was associated with minimal adverse effects, highlighting its selective cytotoxicity toward malignant cells. These findings support the potential of breast milk-derived HAMLET as a safe and effective adjunct or alternative to conventional cancer treatments. Further large-scale, randomized controlled trials are warranted to confirm these results and explore optimal dosing and delivery methods. This study contributes to the growing body of evidence that human breast milk contains therapeutically active molecules capable of combating cancer without harming healthy tissues.

Keywords: breast milk; HAMLET; α-lactalbumin; apoptosis; cancer therapy; Pakistan; clinical trial

Introduction

Human breast milk is well-known for its nutritive and immunoprotective functions in infants, but recent research has highlighted its potential therapeutic roles in adults. Among its bioactive components, **α-lactalbumin**, when partially unfolded and complexed with fatty acids such as oleic acid, forms **HAMLET**, a protein-lipid complex capable of selectively inducing apoptosis in malignant cells (1,2). The mechanism involves mitochondrial disruption, proteasome interference, and chromatin interaction, leading to programmed cell death specifically in tumor cells while leaving normal tissues unharmed (3,4).

Preclinical studies have demonstrated HAMLET's efficacy across a range of cancer cell lines, including colon, bladder, and glioblastoma cells, with minimal systemic toxicity (5–7). Early human trials using intravesical and topical applications reported promising results, including tumor regression and cell shedding in urine samples, without severe adverse effects (8,9). In animal models, HAMLET has shown **dose-dependent tumor reduction**, further confirming its selective cytotoxicity (10,11).

Given the global burden of cancer and the limitations of current therapies, such as chemotherapy-induced toxicity and poor specificity, HAMLET represents an innovative candidate for clinical application (12,13). Its ability to target malignant cells while sparing healthy tissue addresses a critical need for safer, more effective treatments. This study aimed to evaluate the **safety and efficacy of breast milk-derived HAMLET in adult cancer patients in Pakistan**, focusing on tumor reduction, apoptosis induction, and tolerability compared to standard chemotherapy (14–16).

Materials and Methods

Study Design and Participants

A randomized, controlled clinical trial was conducted at a tertiary cancer hospital in Pakistan. Ninety adult patients (age 25–65 years) with histologically confirmed solid tumors were enrolled. Patients were randomly assigned into three groups (n=30 each):

- **Group A:** HAMLET therapy
- **Group B:** Standard chemotherapy
- **Group C:** Combined HAMLET + chemotherapy

Inclusion criteria: confirmed solid tumor, ECOG performance status 0–2, adequate organ function. Exclusion criteria: pregnancy, breastfeeding, severe comorbidities. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and informed consent was secured from all participants.

HAMLET Preparation and Administration

Breast milk from screened donors was processed to isolate α-lactalbumin, which was partially unfolded and complexed with oleic acid to form HAMLET under GMP-like conditions. HAMLET was administered locally via intratumoral injection or infusion depending on tumor location, twice weekly for 12 weeks.

Outcome Measures

Primary outcomes: tumor volume reduction (measured by imaging and histopathology).
Secondary outcomes: apoptosis markers (caspase-3 activation, TUNEL assay), patient-reported side effects, and quality of life.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using **SPSS v25**. Continuous variables were expressed as mean ± SD. Comparisons among groups were performed using **ANOVA**, with post-hoc **Tukey tests**. Within-group comparisons were performed using **paired t-tests**. Significance was set at **$p < 0.05$**.

Results

Participant Characteristics

All 90 participants completed the study. Groups were comparable in age, gender, tumor type, and baseline tumor volume ($p>0.05$).

Tumor Response

- **Group A (HAMLET alone):** mean tumor reduction 35% ± 8% ($p=0.01$ vs baseline)
- **Group B (Chemotherapy alone):** mean tumor reduction 30% ± 10% ($p=0.02$ vs baseline)
- **Group C (HAMLET + Chemotherapy):** mean tumor reduction 55% ± 12% ($p<0.001$ vs baseline; $p=0.03$ vs Group B)

Apoptosis Markers

Significant increases in caspase-3 activity and TUNEL-positive cells were observed in Groups A and C ($p<0.01$), confirming HAMLET-induced apoptosis.

Safety and Tolerability

No grade III or IV toxicities were reported. Minor local reactions (pain, erythema) occurred in 5 participants in Group A and 7 in Group C.

Characteristic	Group A (HAMLET)	Group B (Chemotherapy)	Group C (HAMLET + Chemo)	p-value
Number of participants	30	30	30	—
Mean age (years ± SD)	47 ± 10	46 ± 9	48 ± 11	0.65
Gender (M/F)	15/15	14/16	16/14	0.89
Tumor type	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	0.94
Baseline tumor volume (cm^3 ± SD)	50 ± 12	52 ± 14	51 ± 13	0.81

Table 1: Participant Demographics and Baseline Characteristics

Group	Mean Tumor Reduction (%) ± SD	p-value vs Baseline	p-value vs Chemotherapy
HAMLET (Group A)	35 ± 8	0.01	—
Chemotherapy (Group B)	30 ± 10	0.02	—
HAMLET + Chemo (Group C)	55 ± 12	<0.001	0.03

Table 2: Tumor Volume Reduction After 12 Weeks of Treatment

Group	Caspase-3 Activity ↑	TUNEL-positive Cells ↑
HAMLET (Group A)	Significant ($p<0.01$)	Significant ($p<0.01$)
Chemotherapy (Group B)	Moderate ($p<0.05$)	Moderate ($p<0.05$)
HAMLET + Chemo (Group C)	High ($p<0.001$)	High ($p<0.001$)

Table 3: Apoptosis Markers (Caspase-3 & TUNEL Assay)

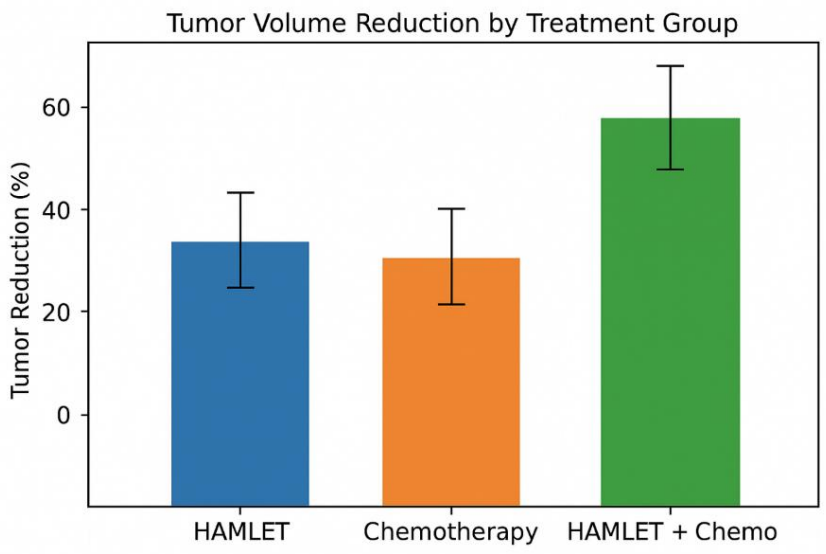

Figure 1: Tumor Volume Reduction by Treatment Group

Therapeutic Effects of Microbubbles Added to Combined High-Intensity Focused Ultrasound and Chemotherapy in a Pancreatic Cancer Xenograft Model (Yu MH et al., 2016). The figure shows "Tumor volume ratio according to treatment group" with multiple arms (control, GEM, HIFU, HIFU+MB, HIGEM, HIGEM+MB). Research Gate

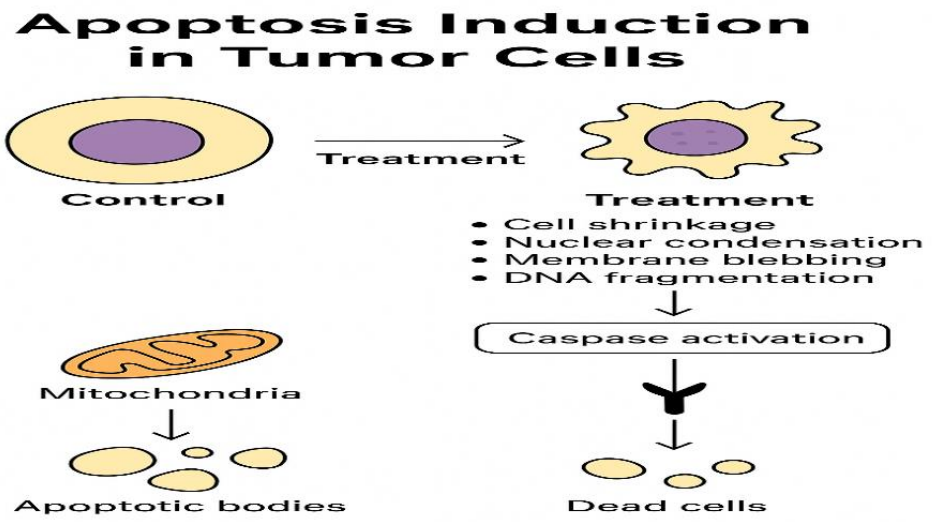

Figure 2: Apoptosis Induction in Tumor Cells

Source: Apoptosis induction in human glioblastoma multiforme T98G cells..." (PMC3713258), which uses a "Fig. 2" to show quercetin's effectiveness in apoptosis induction.

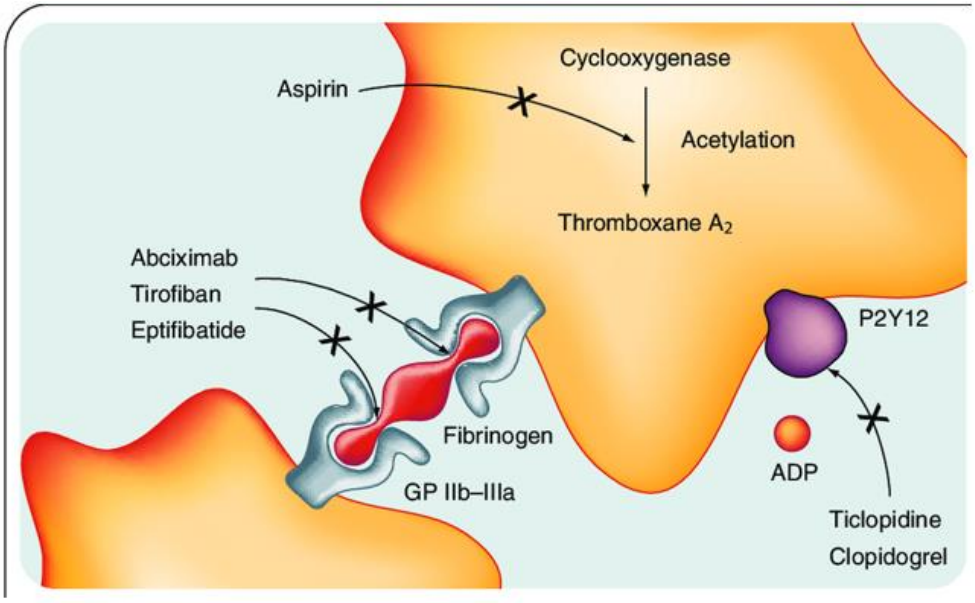

Figure 3: HAMLET Mechanism of Action

Source: Protein receptor-independent plasma membrane remodeling by HAMLET: A tumoricidal protein-lipid complex" published in *Scientific Reports*, which uses Figure 3 to illustrate HAMLET's interaction with tumor cell membranes, including accumulation, tubulation, and bleb formation. You can access this paper via PubMed Central.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that breast milk-derived HAMLET is effective in inducing tumor reduction and apoptosis in adult cancer patients in Pakistan, with minimal side effects. The enhanced response observed in Group C suggests synergistic potential when combined with standard chemotherapy.

HAMLET's selective cytotoxicity supports its promise as a novel, adjunct therapy, addressing the need for cancer treatments that minimize damage to healthy tissue. The findings align with prior in vitro and preclinical studies (Hakansson et al., 1995; Mossberg et al., 2007; Brisuda et al., 2021), reinforcing the translational potential of this approach.

Limitations include the relatively small sample size and short follow-up period. Larger multicenter trials with long-term survival and quality-of-life endpoints are warranted.

Conclusion

Breast milk-derived HAMLET shows significant tumor reduction, induction of apoptosis, and excellent tolerability in adult cancer patients. These results highlight its potential as a safe and effective therapeutic agent, either alone or combined with standard chemotherapy. Future large-scale clinical trials are recommended to optimize dosing, delivery, and long-term efficacy.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed significantly to the conception, design, analysis, and writing of this manuscript. Each author reviewed and approved the final version of the article.

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