

Diabetes drug to treat Alzheimer's?



Researchers in Scotland have said the diabetes drug metformin could be used to treat Alzheimer's disease.

Scientists from Dundee University have found that the drug aids the prevention of the build up of toxic proteins which are associated with the condition.

The drug, which is ingested as a pill, is part of a group of medications which aid in the regulation of blood sugar.

Many people with type 2 diabetes take the pill and it does not have many side effects. Metformin has been proved to be safe, so it could potentially be redeveloped quickly to treat dementia.

The team looked at brain cells taken from mice and saw that the drug had an effect on the "tau tangles" in the brain. These are

toxic proteins which grow on the neurons of people with Alzheimer's disease.

Metaformin was found to trigger an enzyme which decreased the protein formation.

Rebecca Wood, chief executive of the Alzheimer's Research Trust, said: "The link between diabetes and dementia is well known, and these early results suggest a need for further investigation to see whether this drug has the potential to be developed as an Alzheimer's treatment."

"However, it is important to note that this study looked at cells from mice, not people. We need to see the results of pre-clinical and clinical trials before we'll know if the drug could have any benefits for people with Alzheimer's," she added.

16770

Winter cough warning



The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain has asked pharmacists to identify patients with persistent coughs and encourage them to visit their doctors.

Experts said a winter cough which did not go away could be the first indicator of more serious problems.

A chronic cough can be the sign of lung cancer or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

The results of research by the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation found that only one third of people linked a persistent cough with lung cancer.

Only one in 10 people of the 30,000 diagnosed with lung cancer in the UK every year survive the disease for longer than five years.

Many people in the UK catch chest infections when the weather turns cold,

which usually get better after a couple of weeks.

The society said a cough which lasted for longer than three weeks, in addition to tiredness or breathlessness, should be a sign that a person needed to visit their doctor.

Graham Phillips, a member of the society's board, said: "Many people will repeatedly buy cough medicines or maybe iron tablets for tiredness and a lack of energy."

"If you can't seem to shake off symptoms that seem similar to colds and flu, such as a persistent cough or chest infection, or if you keep losing your voice, feel breathless or tired and lacking in energy, then ask your pharmacist for advice instead of buying an over-the-counter medicine or picking something up in the supermarket," he added.

16771

Binge drinking raises risk of heart disease



A new study has revealed that binge drinkers face a greater risk of heart disease to those who drink moderately.

The study compared 10,000 drinkers and found that those who drank a lot of alcohol quickly faced greater health risks than those who drank at a more regular pace during the week.

Work carried out by the British Medical Journal focused on male booze bingers in Belfast and moderate drinker in France over 10 years.

The study found that 9% of the middle-aged men in Belfast were binge drinkers, consuming at least three pints of beer or five glasses of wine in one sitting compared with 0.5% of those in France who tended to drink less alcohol in each sitting but drank more regularly.

Binge drinkers had nearly twice the risk of heart attack or death from heart disease.

Amy Thompson, senior cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation, said: "This reinforces what we already know - that drinking high levels of alcohol can be harmful to your heart. It's important to avoid binge drinking and it's better to have a small amount of alcohol regularly rather than large amounts in one go."

Professor Jean Ferrières from Toulouse University Hospital, who carried out the research, pointed to the irregular pattern of drinking as the key factor.

The authors also felt that the higher risk of heart disease in Belfast could also be linked to the tendency for more of the men in Northern Ireland to drink beer and spirits as opposed to the wine consumed by the French.

UK

New chair for Monitor

HSJ has claimed that health secretary Andrew Lansley is planning to appoint a new chair to the NHS provider regulator, Monitor early next year.

He has written to Monitor chair Steve Bundred and other board members telling them recruitment of a new chair will begin shortly with an appointment expected to be made early next year after an open process, in which Mr Bundred could choose to reapply. It is not yet clear whether Monitor's other board members will be replaced.

16791

Asthma may cost £135m a year

A study published in the journal Thorax has suggested that occupational asthma costs the UK £95-£135m a year, split evenly between sufferers and the government.

The condition is diagnosed in about 3,000 people a year in the UK but often remains undiagnosed in many people. Researchers say that much more should be done by government and employers to address the causes of occupational asthma. For their model they used six hypothetical people who each developed asthma after they were exposed at work to either latex, isocyanates or flour/grain.

16813

GPs want more time with patients

A new survey has suggested more than that 90% of GPs would like to spend more time with their patients per appointment.

The survey of 200 GPs by Aviva UK health found nearly all GPs questioned (97%) said they would like to spend more time with each patient, with 69% stating they would like to see the average appointment increased to 15 minutes, and 24% wanting more than 15 minutes. The current NHS standard requires GP appointment times are kept to 10 minutes, with GPs spending an average of seven minutes per patient.

16734

Obese children risk heart disease



A study has revealed that children aged 9-12 who have a high body mass index (BMI) and fail to lose their excess weight are more likely to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease by the time they reach their mid teens.

The research also found that if girls lose the excess weight before adolescence, their cardiovascular risk profile normalised but that it was only partly reduced in boys.

The research team from Bristol analysed data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children on 5,235 children who had been 9-12 years old at the start of the study.

It found childhood BMI was as good an indicator of risk as waist measurement and fat mass.

The children had blood pressure and the level of cholesterol, glucose and insulin measured when they were 15-16 after having BMI, waist and fat mass recorded at the start of the trial.

Those who had a high BMI at 9-12 years old were much more likely than normal-weight children to have hypertension, and raised cholesterol and insulin levels, at 15-16.

The study highlighted the benefits of weight loss.

But the report authors added: "Our findings highlight the need to shift the whole childhood population distribution of adiposity downwards and to develop interventions that safely and effectively reduce weight and improve cardiovascular risk factors in overweight/obese children."

The British Heart Foundation said it was encouraging that children who tackle weight issues can reduce their risk of heart disease but more must be done to stop them becoming overweight and obese in the first place.

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