

Cheap acne antibiotic could alleviate symptoms of schizophrenia

- Link was discovered after man suffering from paranoia was also treated with antibiotics for pneumonia
- National Institute for Health Research starts £1.9m study next month

By LAUREN PAXMAN

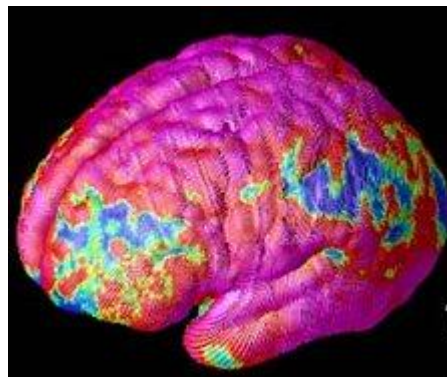
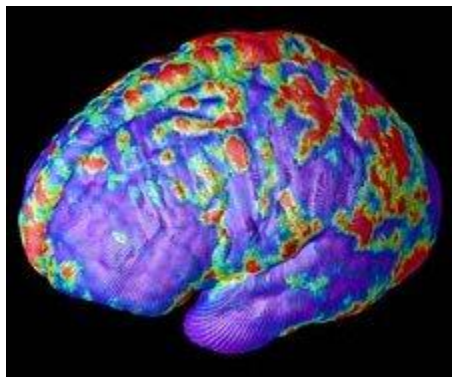
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A cheap antibiotic usually used to treat acne could alleviate the symptoms of schizophrenia, international studies have found.

The National Institute for Health Research will start recruiting patients for a £1.9m UK trial of the drug, minocycline, next month.

The study comes after a chance observation in Japan caused researchers to test the drug in patients with schizophrenia first in Japan itself, and then all over the world.

Trials have already been held in Israel, Pakistan and Brazil where schizophrenic patients treated with the drug showed significant improvement.



Before and after: The National Institute for Health Research will start recruiting patients for a £1.9m UK trial of minocycline next month. Pictured, a brain soon after schizophrenia diagnosis (left) and five years later. - (Courtesy of Paul Thompson/UCLA School of Medicine)

Scientists believe schizophrenia and other mental illnesses including depression and Alzheimer's disease may result from inflammation in the brain.

Minocycline has anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective effects which could account for the positive findings.

The first account of the antibiotic's positive effects appeared in 2007, when a 23-year-old Japanese man was admitted to hospital suffering from persecutory delusions and paranoid ideas.

The subject had no psychiatric history and blood tests and brain scans showed nothing unusual.

He was started on halperidol a powerful anti-psychotic drug, but it had no effect. However when he developed severe pneumonia a week later and was prescribed the antibiotic the infection was cleared and the psychosis resolved within two months.

However, minocycline does not work as a cure.

When the patient stopped taking the drug, his psychiatric symptoms got worse again. But another treatment with minocycline made him better again.

The UK trial will recruit patients recently diagnosed with schizophrenia, Jeremy Laurance, a member of the Schizophrenia Commission, told The Independent.

Half the patients will take minocycline with their standard anti-psychotic treatment, the other half will take a placebo.

Brain scans will be carried out at the beginning and end of the year-long trial to compare loss of grey matter which is an effect of schizophrenia. Tests will also measure inflammatory markers in the blood.

Paul Jenkins, CEO of the charity Rethink Mental Illness told MailOnline: 'We welcome the early promise shown by minocycline in treating psychosis in people with schizophrenia.'

'Nowhere near enough time or money currently goes into researching treatments for schizophrenia or other serious mental illnesses, which cause pain and suffering for many thousands of families across the UK.'



Effective treatment? Minocycline has anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective effects