



Rebound Health

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Antibiotic Offers New Hope

A new study that links an oral antibiotic to improvements in MS has researchers intrigued.

A relatively inexpensive antibiotic that is used to treat skin diseases, such as acne and rosacea, could offer new hope to people with multiple sclerosis (MS). A Canadian study of patients with MS who were given minocycline for one year found that the drug reduced the amount of inflammation in their brains. (Inflammation damages nerves and cells that produce myelin, the nerve's protective sheath, which leads to symptoms of MS.)

The study, published in *Annals of Neurology*, was small (only 10 patients) but its results are being followed closely because of their possible

implications: minocycline is an oral agent while many current MS treatments are injections.

During the study, patients underwent monthly MRIs that highlighted areas of inflammation (lesions) in the brain. In the three months before the study began, the average number of lesions per MRI was 1.38. For the first six months of the study, the average number dropped to .22 per MRI, and by the end of the 12-month study, there were no inflammatory brain lesions on MRI.

It's important to reduce inflammatory lesions in MS patients because they are associated with relapses, explains Dr. Luanne Metz, director of the Calgary Multiple Sclerosis Clinic

and associate professor at the Neuroscience Research Group at the University of Calgary. "After awhile, patients tend not to recover from the symptoms of relapses," she says.

The drug probably works by preventing the entry of white blood cells into the brain, which contributes to inflammation, thus preventing the death of myelin-producing cells, says Metz.

The oral antibiotic has another advantage: at \$80 to \$100 a month, it's more than 10 times cheaper than injectable drugs.

Although the research is promising, further studies are needed, says Metz.

— Wendy Glauser