

Sleeping drug breaks man's 3-year coma

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A 28-year-old South African man who has been comatose since an accident three years ago is able to wake up with the unlikely help of a sleeping medication.

Louis Viljoen was hit by a truck on a highway in 2003, and has been in a persistent vegetative state since with massive head injuries.

But The Daily Mirror said he recently became restless, and Dr. Wally Nel prescribed the common prescription drug Zolpidem to calm him down.

Instead, Viljoen's eyes fluttered and he awoke, the newspaper said.

The report said his brain function is improving slowly, and he is given half a dose of Zolpidem in the morning and again at noon to keep him awake for eight hours a day before he lapses back into a coma.

Nel said Viljoen talks and recognizes friends, but doesn't understand why he is hospitalized.

In July, the British firm ReGen Therapeutics will begin six months of clinical trials on 30 coma patients to see if the drug works on them too, the Mirror said.

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