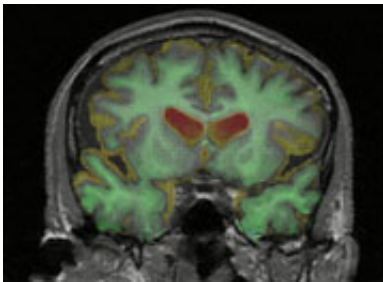


Arthritis drug shown to slow Alzheimer's down

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Early results from University of Southampton.

(Medical Xpress)—A drug that is commonly used for arthritis has been shown to slow the progression of Alzheimer's.

A small randomised control study at the University of Southampton tested the drug Etanercept on patients with mild to moderate Alzheimer's.

Forty-one participants were either given the drug or a placebo every week for six months. They were then assessed for memory function, efficiency of day-to-day activities and behaviour.

Results showed that patients who were given Etanercept did not get any worse during the six month follow up compared to those on the placebo, who did decline.

Professor Clive Holmes, who led the study, is presenting the results at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference in Denmark. He comments: "Our results are better than we expected. We have shown that using Etanercept in patients who have Alzheimer's disease would be safe and has positive outcomes after six months. However this is a small study and should now be tested in a larger clinical trial."

Alzheimer's and other dementias affect 820,000 people in the UK. Around 23 million of the UK population have a close friend or family member with dementia. As well as the huge personal cost, dementia costs the UK economy £23 billion a year, more than cancer and heart disease combined.

Etanercept works by blocking the effects of a protein in the blood called $\text{TNF}\alpha$ which is released by blood cells as part of the body's inflammatory response. Professor Holmes' group has already shown that people with Alzheimer's that have high levels of active $\text{TNF}\alpha$ in their blood do worse than those who have very low levels. Etanercept acts to markedly reduce the active levels of $\text{TNF}\alpha$.

Professor Holmes adds: "A large number of anti-inflammatory approaches have been tried in patients with established Alzheimer's, but with little evidence of efficacy. There are very few studies that have come out with everything moving in the right direction. We have shown that a targeted approach against $\text{TNF}\alpha$ offers protection against the development of the disease. Our study was small and lasted for six months so it needs to be developed further, however our projections suggest that the benefits would continue. This now needs to be tested."

Dr Eric Karran, Director of Research at Alzheimer's Research UK, the UK's leading dementia research charity, says: "After many years of research into the role of the immune system in Alzheimer's, led by the team in Southampton, it's promising to see a compound targeting this

process showing encouraging early results in people. While we still await the full report of the findings, Etanercept, a drug already recommended for use in arthritis, appeared to be well tolerated by the Alzheimer's patients enrolled into the trial.

"This is a good example of research implicating a mechanism in the disease – in this case systemic inflammation – narrowing down a potential target and using a compound against that target to test a hypothesis. However, we know that clinical trials have a high failure rate and so we need to see Etanercept tested further in larger and longer trials in Alzheimer's disease."

Provided by University of Southampton

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