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Ecstasy 'relieves Parkinson's Disease'



Tim Lawrence says ecstasy has helped him

Tim Lawrence has found a drug that is far more effective at controlling the symptoms of his Parkinson's Disease than any prescribed by a doctor.

The only problem is that it is Ecstasy, the illegal and dangerous stimulant much favoured by night-club ravers.

His discovery could overturn 30 years of medical thought, and eventually lead to a new treatment for Parkinson's.

However, some scientists fear the short term effect might be outweighed by longer term severe damage to his health.

Tim used to be a film stuntman performing feats of physical bravery.

Now he spends much of his day either unable to move at all, or twitching uncontrollably.

Tim suffers from young-onset Parkinson's Disease, a rare form of an illness that usually hits the elderly.

The condition is slowly freezing up his body.

Side effects

“
It is illegal, but there is not really a punishment out there that could match what I go through on a day to day basis
”

Tim Lawrence

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Tim can perform gymnastic
just as

badly from the drug he takes to combat the disease.

The drug, L-DOPA helps to unlock his frozen limbs, but it also gives him wild, flailing movements called dyskinesias.

L-DOPA replaces the vital brain chemical called dopamine that is in short supply in Parkinson's patients.

The drug is highly effective at first, but within a few years side effects begin to appear.

These are particularly severe in those who get Parkinson's early - of whom there are 8,000 in the UK alone.

However, until now scientists have failed to come up with an effective alternative for L-DOPA, or any treatment to moderate its effects.

Chance discovery

Tim made the discovery about Ecstasy completely by chance. He had taken the drug while on a night-club visit with friends.

He said: "I was just suddenly aware that everything was completely smooth, as though I never had the disease in the first place."



Tim used to have a daredevil lifestyle

The drug appears to tame his body and give him back control over his limbs.

Within two hours of taking an Ecstasy tablet, Tim is able to do backflips, somersaults and swallow-dives in a gym.

He said: "We take risks every day of our lives. It is illegal, but there is not really a punishment out there that could match what I go through on a day to day basis."

Despite the positive effects he derives from Ecstasy, Tim only takes the drug a couple of times a month - usually when he is out clubbing.

"I would not want to feel like that all day every day. It is an unreal state."

Dangers of the drug

There are serious health risks associated with taking Ecstasy.

It is rarely fatal, but it can cause memory black outs and depression. Research also suggests it might be particularly damaging to people with Parkinson's.

The challenge for scientists is to find a drug that will replicate the effect of Ecstasy with none of the attendant dangers.

“
There just may be in his experience a clue - a vital clue - that is going to help us find a way forward

”

Professor David Brooks, of Hammersmith Hospital, said Tim's discovery was fascinating.

**Mary Baker,
Parkinson's Disease
Society**

He is particularly intrigued because Ecstasy appears to have no impact on dopamine levels. It does, however, trigger the release of massive amounts of another brain chemical, serotonin.

High levels of serotonin stimulate a feeling of euphoria, but it had not been thought to have any impact on movement.

Yet tests carried out by Professor Brooks show that Ecstasy alone is enough to unfreeze Tim's limbs - in fact dopamine appears to play no part in the process at all.

Mary Baker, of the Parkinson's Disease Society, said: "The society has to say that it absolutely cannot condone in any way the

taking of an illegal substance.

"But the society has a moral obligation to ensure that some research follows Tim's experience because there just may be in his experience a clue - a vital clue - that is going to help us find a way forward in the better management of Parkinson's Disease."

Tim's story is told in BBC television's Horizon programme broadcast on Thursday 15 February at 2100 GMT.

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