Ashwagandha hope against Alzheimer's

Nat'l Brain Centre Study Claims Progress In Mice

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New Delhi: The late US President Ronald Reagan had it; former Union minister George Fernandes is battling it, and Amitabh Bachchan made it a street word with his 2005 movie *Black*. But Alzheimer's, a degenerative disorder of the brain marked by memory and judgment loss and occurring usually in people above 65, has defied a cure so far. But, researchers at the National Brain Research Centre (NBRC) now seem to be closer to success. Working on mice with Alzheimer's disease with extracts of the roots of Ashwagandha, a herb used in ayurveda since ancient times, they have reported promising results.

The NBRC scientists found that the extract can reverse memory loss and may prove to be an effective cure for the disease in humans.

NBRC neuroscientist Vijayalakshmi Ravindranath tested the semi-purified sample extracted at Delhi University on genetically modified mice with Alzheimer's disease. Two sets of test mice—middle aged (9-10 months) and old (2 years)—were given oral doses of the extract for 30 days and monitored. Over the month, scientists found a reduction in amyloid plaques (a symptom of Alzheimer's) in the mice brains and improvement in the animals' cognitive abilities.

Their study was published in the Proceedings of The National Academy of Sciences, and the Nature India Journal. DU's Subhash Chand Jain said they were asked to extract the chemical from the Ashwagandha root. "Vijayalakshmi was excited as she saw some of the fractions were active. Then we worked on pinning down the fraction which was most active," he said.

HERBAL THERAPY

- Alzheimer's is a progressive brain disease that **slowly destroys memory and thinking skills,** and eventually even the ability to carry out some simple tasks
- **Amyloids are protein aggregations** that share specific traits
- **Beta Amyloid is the main component of amyloid plaques,** deposits found in the brains of patients with Alzheimer's
- **Ashwagandha extract given to mice in NBRC lab for 30 days** showed considerable reduction in the amyloid plaques that had formed in their brains