

Shark liver could help to treat Parkinson's

By Sarah Knapton

A SUBSTANCE found in the livers of dogfish sharks could help treat Parkinson's disease, scientists at Cambridge University believe.

Early research suggests the compound, called squalamine, not only prevents the formation of toxic plaques called Lewy bodies which accumulate in the brains of sufferers, but also stops them being as damaging once they have formed.

The compound has been used in clinical trials for cancer and eye conditions in America, and a trial in Parkin-

son's disease patients is now being planned by one of the researchers involved in the study. Studies on human cells and worms suggests that it could be a valuable treatment for the disease.

"To our surprise, we found evidence that squalamine not only slows down the formation of the toxins associated with Parkinson's disease, but also makes them less toxic altogether," said Professor Christopher Dobson, of St John's College at Cambridge University.

"It is possible that a drug treating at least some of the symptoms of Parkinson's could be developed from squalamine. We might then be able to im-

prove on that incrementally, by searching for better molecules that augment its effects."

Squalamine is an anti-microbial compound which was discovered in the Nineties in the liver tissue of dogfish sharks by scientists who were looking for an explanation as to why the fish were so good at fighting off infection. Scientists can now create the compound in a synthetic form in the lab.

Claire Bale, of Parkinson's UK, said the discovery was "especially promising" and merited further study. The findings are published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

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