

# Blood pressure treatment may stop dementia

**Tom Whipple** Science Editor

Common blood pressure medication could be used to stop the deterioration in blood vessels that leads to a common form of dementia, a study says.

The research on rats looked into ways of preventing and reversing changes in blood vessels in the brain that can lead to “small vessel disease”, a precursor to vascular dementia.

Vascular dementia is the second most common type of dementia after Alzheimer’s disease, affecting about 40 per cent of sufferers. It occurs after the cells lining blood vessels begin to malfunction, in turn causing damage in the brain, in particular to myelin, the “white matter” that protects nerve cells.

The research, published in *Science Translational Medicine*, has found clues to the mechanism behind the condition and ways of stopping it.

Anna Williams, from the University of Edinburgh, said it meant that this form of dementia could be easier to treat than Alzheimer’s disease, which despite billions of pounds of research is incurable. The blood pressure drugs were tested on rats bred to have small vessel disease. She added: “We can not only prevent but reverse the problems in their myelin. If we are able to do the same in humans we may be able to reverse some of the pathology.”

Sara Imarisio, of Alzheimer’s Research UK, said that it highlighted “a promising direction for research”.