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HEALTH

Scientists say drug may block Alzheimer's

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- It might be possible to make a pill that prevents the brain damage that marks Alzheimer's disease, U.S. researchers said Thursday.

Scientists said they had designed a drug that, at least in test tubes, stops the buildup of sticky proteins that kills brain cells in Alzheimer's patients.

The approach, which keeps the proteins from clumping, may also work against other diseases including infection with the AIDS virus, said Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator Gerald Crabtree of Stanford University.

Crabtree and colleagues Jason Gestwicki and Isabella Graef developed a small molecule that enlists the aid of a larger, naturally occurring "chaperone" protein to block the accumulation of the brain-clogging beta-amyloid protein.

Between the two of them, the small molecule drug and the chaperone protein stopped the building blocks of amyloid protein from linking up and making clogs, the researchers report in Friday's issue of the journal Science.

Now they will test it in animal models with versions of Alzheimer's disease.

There is no cure for Alzheimer's, which affects an estimated 4.5 million Americans.

Earlier this week a team at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences and the University of Wisconsin said they found a naturally occurring brain protein that stops the progression of Alzheimer's disease in human brain tissue.



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The protein, called transthyretin, appears to protect brain cells by intercepting beta-amyloid protein before it can damage brain tissue.

Drugs that boost transthyretin levels may help treat or even prevent the disease, the researchers told a Society for Neuroscience meeting in San Diego.

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