

# Illegal sex pills cause brain damage

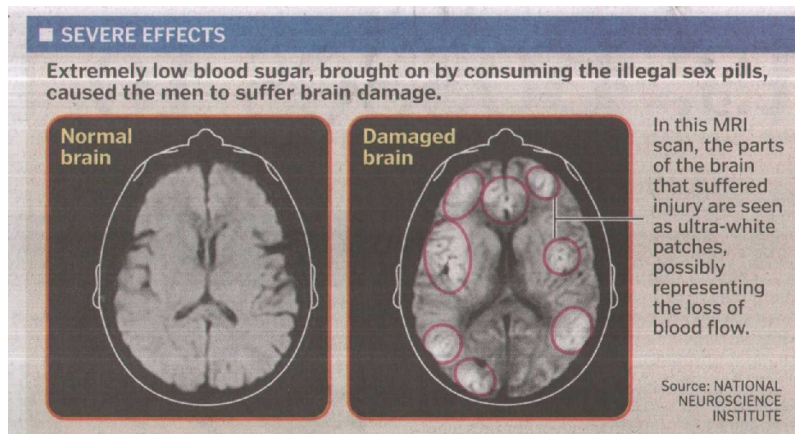
Study finds 8 who took Power 1 Walnut suffered irreversible damage

■ BY JUDITH TAN

EIGHT patients who took illegal sex drugs here suffered debilitating and irreversible brain damage, researchers have found.

While one developed complications from taking the banned substance Power 1 Walnut and died of pneumonia, the other seven were left with degrees of disability: One is bedridden and needs to be tube-fed, while most of the others need help to eat, walk or go to the toilet.

Their memory, thought processes and movement have all been impaired, said radiologist Tchoyoson Lim, the lead investigator in a study into the link between the illegal sex pills, low blood sugar and brain damage.



The results of the study of the eight victims, one of the largest in the world because of the condition's rarity, have been published in this month's issue of *Radiology*, a United States medical journal.

Using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) on the study subjects, scientists from the National Neuroscience Institute found lesions and plaque build-up in parts of their brains. The damaged areas were those that controlled short-term memory, spatial navigation, emotions, un-

derstanding and learning.

The brain damage the men, aged between 26 and 73, suffered was the result of their blood sugar levels plummeting to dangerously low levels, a condition known as hypoglycaemia.

Power 1 Walnut contains glibenclamide, which, in much lower doses, brings down high sugar levels in diabetics.

The brain damage they suffered is rare, but can also hit diabetics who overdose on pills they take to control their

blood sugar levels, and some patients with liver and pancreatic cancer.

The study has also given doctors clues into diagnosing diabetics who overdose on their medication, said Dr Lim.

"By looking at which parts of the brain are affected and how serious the injuries are, we are able to make the right diagnoses and give the right treatment. It is especially important as some of the symptoms can mimic those of stroke or infection," he added.

Brain damage caused by severely low blood sugar is hard to study simply because it is rare. Only two such cases surfaced among diabetics here in the last four years.

Since Power 1 Walnut first surfaced here in January, 222 men and one woman have fallen ill from taking them.

Many have suffered brain damage, the researchers believe.

Despite repeated warnings from the Health Sciences Authority (HSA), more have continued taking them.

Said Ms Chan Cheng Leng, the director of HSA's Pharmacovigilance Branch: "With the MRI findings, I hope these people would now realise the dangers of such pills and not gamble with their health."

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