Medical News in Brief

Orexin Agonist Effective but Not Safe in Narcolepsy Trial

A new treatment for narcolepsy improved people's ability to stay awake and reduced their weekly episodes of cataplexy, or sudden muscle weakness, compared with placebo, according to results from an 8-week clinical trial that included 73 participants. Currently, people with narcolepsy manage their condition with multiple medications that often do not control all their symptoms.

All participants had narcolepsy type 1, a condition defined by cataplexy symptoms and loss of neurons that produce orexin—a neuropeptide also known as hypocretin that binds to receptors in the brain to help people stay awake and alert. The drug used in the study was an orexin agonist.

The trial was terminated, however, because 8 participants experienced drug-induced liver damage. “Despite the halt in the development of [the drug], there is a strong rationale to pursue the use of orexin agonists for the treatment of narcolepsy type 1 and perhaps other disorders of hypersomnolence or circadian dislocation,” the author of a linked editorial wrote in the New England Journal of Medicine.

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Note: Source references are available through embedded hyperlinks in the article text online.