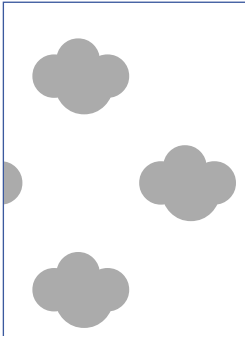




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## **SCIENCE** Psychedelics mind mending powers reported to help treat depression

Published 17 Jan 2018 11:23AM

Words by Holly McHugh | Staff Writer

Depression can be a crippling mental illness, hindering the lives of more than **300 million people globally**. Perhaps one of the most common mental illnesses - with 7.8% of people in Britain affected - it is apparent that the quest for long-lasting effective treatment is of particular importance; an ongoing mission to conquer this sometimes fatal hijacker of the mind.

Currently, there are a number of treatments available: cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), individual and/or group face-to-face psychological treatments delivered by professionals, and notorious antidepressant medication that doctors seem to hand out at the drop of a hat, such as selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRI's).

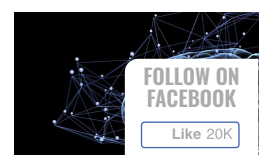
Psychological therapy treatments prove to be extremely successful for some people, especially those with only mild depression. However, those with more chronic symptoms, whose feelings of sadness interfere with functioning in everyday life and struggle to peel their bleary-eyed selves from their beds in the morning, often find these methods to be ineffective - resorting to the use of SSRI's.

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SSRI's can also be very helpful to some people. Neurotransmitters such as serotonin, are **chemical messengers that deliver signals between brain cells**. If you suffer with depression, the areas of your brain that regulate mood and send messages using serotonin might not function properly.

SSRI's work by boosting levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin in the brain, by blocking its reabsorption and making it more readily available. Unfortunately, despite their dominant presence in

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coming off them and other problems they bring about.

With no new treatments or other options, and a general failure in helping people with depression, psychedelic medicine is rearing its mushroom shaped head.

The prospect of psychedelic drugs being utilised to treat mental illness has been investigated for decades. They have been repeatedly proven to be capable of alleviating symptoms of depression for long periods from just a single dose. However the psychedelic revolution was halted due to their criminalisation established in the 70's - they escaped the labs into the hands of mind-altering hungry people, leading to their demise.

Now scientists are facing the gruelling challenge of bringing them back to life, undergoing rigorous trials trying to prove their promise as a way of treating mental illness.



The healing ingredient psilocybin - a psychoactive compound found naturally occurring in magic mushrooms - is thought to reset key brain circuits that play a role in depression. Imperial College London researchers, led by neuroscientist Robert Carhart-Harris, have highlighted its ability to help surmount this seemingly incurable sadness, in a recent study working with people who have failed to find any form of beneficial treatment.

The trial involved 20 participants who took part in two sessions of psychedelic-assisted therapy, receiving one low dose of psilocybin (10mg) and one high dose (25mg); accompanied by professional therapists whilst listening to specifically chosen music, they embarked on their healing trip. Remarkably, all 20 participants reported that this form of treatment helped lift their depression for up to three weeks - just from those two doses! Another 5 claimed it was sufficient enough to relieve them for three months.

So, pretty significant results compared to those taking SRRI's, struggling away trying to trick their brains into feeling happier. However, these findings are somewhat scrutinised, due to the lack of a control group and small sample size. Further research is necessary to solidify the claims from Carhart-Harris and his team; if larger studies with the presence of a control group are successful at producing similar outcomes, the implications could be profound.

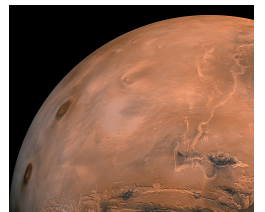
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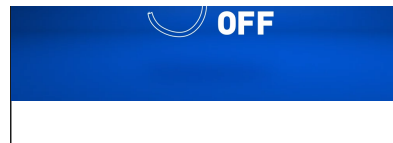
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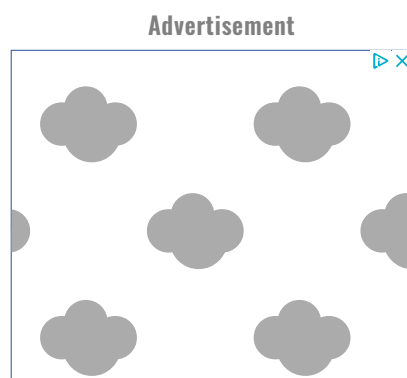


## Resetting the brain

Robert Carhart-Harris investigated the nature of psilocybin's therapeutic properties by performing brain scans using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), before and after patients had received psilocybin-assisted therapy. The scans revealed decreased blood flow to the amygdala - a region in the brain associated with depression and emotional responses such as stress and fear.

A more surprising outcome was that the integrity of another region of the brain called the default mode network - also known for being a major player in depression - had increased one day after therapy. The magnitude of these changes correlated with the extent to which patients reported their depression had lifted when interviewed.

Carhart-Harris believes this is a reset process of how the brain functions, unlocking its ability to remodel itself to a healthier mode; "Psilocybin may be giving these individuals the temporary 'kick start' they need to break out of their depressive states and these imaging results do tentatively support a 'reset' analogy. Similar brain effects to these have been seen with electroconvulsive therapy" he says.



In other newly published research reported in the Journal of Psychopharmacology, it is thought that the use of classic psychedelic drugs, such as the infamous LSD, is associated with a reduced likelihood for antisocial and criminal behaviour. The study involved 480,000 adult respondents from the United States over 13 years.

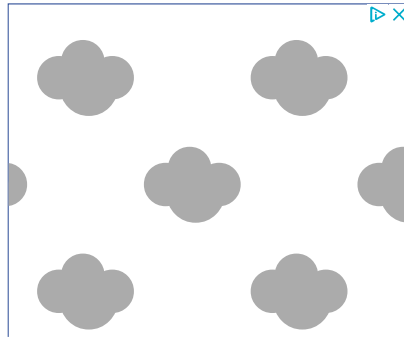
The findings indicated that lifetime classic use of psychedelics was associated with a 27% decreased likelihood of larceny or theft, and a 22% reduction in the likelihood of committing a violent crime. It was also reported that use of other illicit substances was related to an increase in criminal activity.

Perhaps a fairly obvious outcome; if you think about it. Take a group of trippy hippies and a group of raging coke heads, who is more likely to commit a crime? It makes you wonder why psychedelic drugs such as LSD are in the same classification as cocaine and even heroin.

**"More research is needed to figure out what factors underlie these effects," Co-author Zach Walsh says.**

"But the experiences of unity, positivity and transcendence that characterize the psychedelic experience may have lasting benefits that translate into real-world consequences." Despite the benefits of psychedelic substances advocated by these studies, it is strongly advised that people do not try and self-medicate themselves

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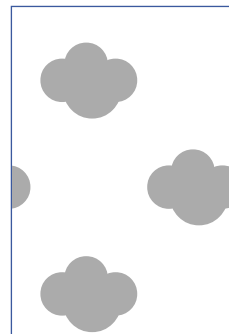
We would not want a pandemic of once depressed and now crazed magic mushroom foragers on our hands. The dosages for medicinal psychedelics are strictly monitored and administered by professionals in a controlled environment, removing the possibility of overdosing or causation of harm to oneself or others around them.

With a number of new studies consistently uncovering the benefits of this type of drug treatment, it is believed that psilocybin could revolutionize the mental health field. These new findings highlight the need to research further into the potential benefits of these stigmatized substances.

Psychedelics: Lifting the veil | Robin Carhart-Harris | TEDxWarwick



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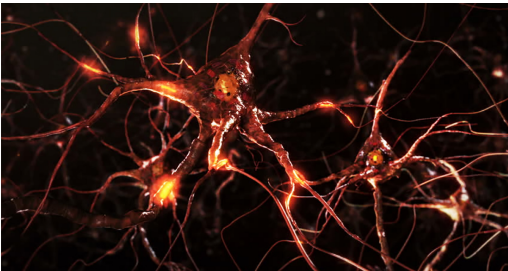
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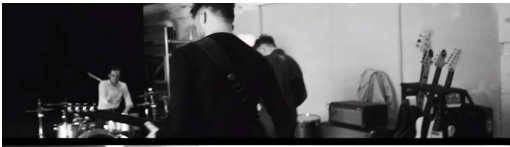
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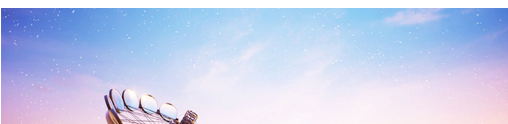
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