

Shrub used by native California tribes may treat Alzheimer's

PLANT EXTRACT

LONDON: A shrub, used by native Californian tribes to treat respiratory ailments, fever and headaches, contains a potent chemical which could help treat Alzheimer's disease, a study claims.

The medicinal powers of aspirin, digitalis, and the anti-malarial artemisinin all come from plants.

The research, published in the journal *Redox Biology*, shows that the treatment for Alzheimer's disease may also be found in nature.

"Because age is a major risk factor, researchers are looking at ways to counter aging's effects on the brain," said Pamela Maher, a scientist at Salk Institute in the US.

"Our identification of sterubin as a potent neuroprotective component of a native California plant called Yerba santa (*Eriodictyon californicum*) is a promising step in that direction," Maher said.

Native California tribes, which dubbed the plant "holy herb" in Spanish, have long used Yerba santa for its medicinal properties.

Devotees brew its leaves to treat respiratory ailments, fever and headaches; and mash it into a poultice for wounds, sore muscles and rheumatism.

To identify natural compounds that might reverse neurological disease symptoms, Maher applied a screening technique used in drug discovery to a commercial library of 400 plant extracts with known pharmacological properties.

The lab had previously used this approach to identify other chemicals (called flavonoids) from plants that have anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective properties.