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April Hit Counter 92648 The UGR researcher points out that such oxidative stress also has effects in animals' blood, as blood cells have been proven to be "more fragile with the years and, therefore, their cell membranes become easier to break".

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The authors of this innovative finding administered small amounts of melatonin to mice and observed that not only did this substance neutralize the oxidative stress and the inflammatory process caused by ageing, but it also delayed its effects, thus increasing longevity. In particular, the University of Granada's goal was to analyse the mitochondrial function in mice and check their mitochondrial capacity to produce ATP – adenosine triphosphate – a molecule whose mission is to store the energy every cell needs to carry out its functions.

Professor Acuña Castroviejo highlights that chronic administration of melatonin in animals from the moment they stop producing this substance – five months of age in mice – helps counteract all age-related processes. Therefore, daily melatonin intake in humans from the age of 30 or 40 could prevent – or, at least, delay – illnesses related to ageing, free radicals and inflammatory processes, such as many neurodegenerative disorders (e.g. Parkinson's disease) and complications linked to other illnesses, like diabetes.

The researcher is confident that the Spanish Ministry of Health will soon legalise the use of melatonin since, being a substance naturally produced by the body, it cannot be patented and the drug industry would not make much profit out of its artificial production. However, "while the substance becomes legalised, humans should try to increase melatonin consumption through food", recommends professor Acuña Castroviejo.

The results of this study have been published in some of the world's most prestigious medical journals, such as Free Radical Research, Experimental Gerontology, Journal of Pineal Research and Frontiers in Bioscience.

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