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22/06/05 - Health news section

Brain discovery may restore memory

Scientists have made a major breakthrough which could eventually help restore memory to people affected by brain injury or diseases such as Alzheimer's, according to findings of a new research.

The research, published in Nature journal, reveals it only takes a single human brain cell to recognise people, landmarks, objects and names.

Neuroscientists at The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) say their findings fly in the face of conventional thinking about how brain cells function.

Professor Christof Koch, of UCLA, said: "Conventional wisdom views individual brain cells as simple switches or relays.

"In fact, we are finding that neurons are able to function more like a sophisticated computer."

The team conducted its research on living human brains, rather than animal brains or post-mortem brains.

Patients with epilepsy consented to be wired with electrodes to participate in a series of recognition experiments.

Dr Itzhak Fried, of Caltech, said: "Our ability to record directly from the living brains of consenting clinical patients is an invaluable tool for unravelling neural mysteries more efficiently and accurately.

"This new understanding of individual neurons as 'thinking cells' is an important step toward cracking the brain's cognition code.

"As our understanding grows, we one day may be able to build cognitive prostheses to replace functions lost due to brain injury or disease, perhaps even memory."

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