

# Chocolate cough cure

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CHOCOLATE could provide the key to tackling a persistent cough, researchers claim.

They are carrying out the final stages of clinical trials on a drug that contains theobromine, an ingredient naturally present in cocoa and chocolate.

If the trials are successful, the drug could be on the market within two years.

More than seven million Britons suffer from a persistent cough, defined as one that lasts for more than two weeks.

Some have asthma-like symptoms while others suffer from heartburn.

But most widely-available cough products soothe the symptoms

rather than deal with the cause, and have been criticised for side effects such as drowsiness.

There are safety concerns about side effects from other products that are codeine-based, which use a chemical called an opioid.

Previous research by London's National Heart and Lung Institute found that theobromine is 33 per cent more effective than codeine at stopping coughing.

It works directly on the vagus nerve, which is responsible for

persistent coughing. Research in South Korea has shown that theobromine has none of the side effects associated with standard drug treatments for persistent cough.

Professor Alyn Morice, a leading expert in the treatment of cough who is head of the Hull Cough Clinic, said: 'Thousands of people

across the UK suffer from persistent cough, and due to the drawbacks of current opioid drugs such as codeine, we are in desperate need of a non-opioid treatment

with a drastically improved side effect profile for patients.'

A research project set to begin next year will be the final phase of clinical trials of a drug called BC1036. The drug is being developed by SEEK, a leading UK privately-owned drug discovery group.

Manfred Scheske, CEO of consumer health at SEEK, said: 'Persistent cough is a very common condition, often lasting for weeks after a viral infection. It can be

difficult to treat, especially since it is not possible to give large doses of opiate-based medication to patients due to side-effect issues.

'This drug has the potential to dramatically impact the treatment of persistent cough and could greatly benefit the quality of life of persistent cough sufferers.'

■ The cost of hot chocolate drinks is set to soar, analysts predicted yesterday.

The industry has been hit by a record 32 per cent rise in the price of cocoa powder this year.

A crop shortage and disruption to supplies from the Ivory Coast because of a 'chaotic' general election have been blamed.

Chocolate bars and confectionery will not be affected to the same extent, as they are made using cocoa butter, which has seen a lesser rise of 11 per cent.