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Fish skin to treat severe burns

26 May 2017 | News

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Researchers in Brazil are experimenting with a new treatment for severe burns using the skin of tilapia fish, an unorthodox procedure they say can ease the pain of victims and cut medical costs.

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Brazil's public hospitals, however, lack human and pig skin supplies and the artificial alternatives easily available in Western countries. Instead, gauze bandage, which needs regular changing often painfully is the norm.

Tilapia is abundant in Brazil's rivers and fish farms, which are expanding rapidly as demand grows for the mildly flavored freshwater fish. Scientists at the Federal University of Ceara in northern Brazil have found that tilapia skin has moisture, collagen and disease resistance at levels comparable to human skin, and can aid in healing.

In China, researchers have tested tilapia skin on rodents to study its healing properties, but scientists in Brazil say their trials are the first on humans.

The researchers hope the treatment will prove commercially viable and encourage businesses to process tilapia skin for medical use.