

Can we delay aging by killing off old cells with powerful drug combo?

We have a good idea of what makes individual cells old. Things like DNA damage, shortened chromosome ends, and a lack of proliferative ability can all cause cells to basically shut down—they don't die, but they stop dividing and become quiescent. But we don't have a strong sense of what makes an organism old. It could be the cumulative effect of lots of their cells getting old, or there may be additional means of registering an organism's age.

Now, a new study suggests at least part of the answer may be a mix of the two. The study, done using mice, indicates that having a small population of cells that have hit the wall due to aging can induce symptoms of age-related decline in otherwise young mice. And a drug combination that targets these [senescent] cells can block these problems from taking root. The same drugs, when given to elderly mice, also reduce mortality and limit some of the symptoms of age.

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Could this work in humans? There's a hint that it might. The researchers obtained fat from obese people in for surgery; this normally contains senescent cells. The researchers confirmed that treating the fat with these chemicals reduced the number of senescent cells present.

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[However], while senescent cells may be part of the picture, they're far from the whole story on aging.

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