

Obesity gene? Suppressing this variant could be key to weight loss

More than five years ago, a group of researchers from Norway and several other countries found an important clue in the mystery surrounding obesity. They discovered a mutation that gave humans a significantly greater risk of developing obesity.

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[Researcher Jan-Inge] Bjune used gene technology to turn off the IRX5 gene in a group of mice. It had a dramatic effect.

“Almost all the fat disappeared on the mice,” he said.

The animals were not just slim. They also appeared to be completely protected from developing obesity, even when given fatty foods that usually make mice fat.

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Bjune and his colleagues’ results suggest that it may be possible to create drugs that allow people who are obese to lose weight without eating less.

But it will not be easy.

The genes in question are important, says Bjune.

They probably play a significant role in foetal development, and are necessary for eyesight and the heart, as two examples. It’s not necessarily a good idea to give people medicines that knock out these genes throughout the body.

Instead, researchers will have to try to make drugs that affect IRX3 and IRX5 only in adipose tissue.

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