

Brain protein may help treat schizophrenia

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U.S. scientists say a recently discovered small protein in the brain may represent a target for the treatment of schizophrenia.

The protein -- neuropeptide S, or NPS -- was discovered by Pharmaceutical Sciences Professor Rainer Reinscheid of the University of California-Irvine. He found NPS is produced by a small cluster of cells in the brainstem, yet its specialized receptors are found in several areas of the brain.

Reinscheid and colleagues reported finding the new neuropeptide last year. Now Reinscheid's group says it has determined NPS can reduce the biochemical and behavioral symptoms of schizophrenia in an established animal model.

Animals pretreated with NPS before receiving a drug that normally induces psychotic-like behaviors reportedly did not develop the signature behavioral symptoms and neurochemical features of schizophrenia.

"Whether molecules activating the NPS system will prove to be better drugs than others used to treat the symptoms of schizophrenia remains to be seen," said Reinscheid. "We still have a very long way to go before proving it can alleviate symptoms in humans as we've seen it do in rodents."

The findings were presented this week in Pittsburgh during the 6th International Congress of Neuroendocrinology.

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