

Mice may help treat mental disorders

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U.S. scientists say for the first time a psychiatric test for monitoring mental abnormalities has been adapted for use in research mice.

A Purdue University animal sciences researcher says mice that couldn't be dissuaded from the object of their attention by a piece of sweet, crunchy cereal may help researchers find new treatments and cures for human disorders such as autism and Parkinson's disease.

The test -- developed at Purdue, the University of California-Davis, and Justus-Liebig University in Giessen, Germany -- involves switching attention from one task to another, a skill often impaired in people with autism and similar illnesses.

"Without a measure of cognitive deficit in mice that is relevant to such disorders in humans, research into new diagnostic methods, treatments and cures is severely hindered," said Joseph Garner, a Purdue assistant professor and the study's lead author. "The level of complexity at which we assess mouse behavior is often very rudimentary, and it just does not match up with subtleties of the cognitive deficits in human mental dysfunction or with the tools we use to study the mechanisms that underlie disorders in people."

The study appears online in the journal Behavioral Brain Research.

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