

Herbal remedy reduces obesity and heart disease?

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With unprecedented levels of obesity across the Western world, and incidence of associated heart disease, cancer and diabetes rising, there is a major drive to find new treatments. Scientists from Germany have recently discovered that extracts of a traditional herbal remedy derived from *Tabebuia impetiginosa* can act to delay the absorption of dietary fat in animal models.

They believe that the extract could be incorporated into a food supplement which may not only reduce obesity, but also lessen the risk of development of type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease. Dr Nils Roos from the Max Rubner Institute will present the results on Monday 7th July at the Society for Experimental Biology's Annual Meeting in Marseille.

Dr Roos and his team have shown that *Tabebuia* extract can reduce levels of triglycerides, a breakdown product of fat, in rats after they have been fed a fatty meal. "This result shows the extract may have a potential use in treating obesity," he observes. "However, as coronary heart disease and diabetes have also been shown to be associated with higher triglyceride levels after eating, we believe a food-supplement based on *Tabebuia* could reduce the incidence of these diseases as well. What is more, as obesity in developing countries is also on the increase, such extracts, taken as a capsule or added to food, may be a cheaper alternative for the rural population to pharmaceuticals."

Although it is clear that *Tabebuia* extract can act to inhibit the

absorption of dietary fat, the scientists have not yet identified the exact compounds within the extract that are responsible for the effects. "The actual substances involved are probably even more active than the extract," says Dr Roos. "We are currently in the process of identifying these compounds, and will then test long-term efficiency and safety in miniature pigs whose physiology is closer to that of humans than rat physiology is, before moving onto human trials. At this point, we hope to be able to develop the extract, either as a food supplement or in a medicinal context."

Source: Society for Experimental Biology

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