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**DIABETES**

## **Incretin therapy shows promise**

**In experiments on rats, the gut hormones increased the number of insulin-producing cells in the pancreas.**

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Physicians who treat diabetes consider incretin therapy one of the most exciting new tools that they've seen in a long time for combating the disease.

Doctors discovered the possible role of incretins' effect on blood sugar after noting the dramatic effect bariatric surgery was having on patients. After gastric bypass surgery, diabetics often see their blood sugar levels become normal within a week, before any real weight loss. One reason, doctors theorize, is because the surgery spurs an increased production of incretins. Some doctors began prescribing these gut hormones to patients with type 2 diabetes, and found the drugs indeed reduced blood sugar levels without adding weight.

Dr. Wei-An "Andy" Lee, an endocrinologist and assistant professor at USC's Keck School of Medicine, is among those using the therapy with some success.

Though we don't have long-term studies on humans, said Dr. Enrico Cagliero, an endocrinologist at Massachusetts General Hospital and associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, researchers have found that rats that received incretin therapy increased the number of insulin-producing cells in the pancreas, and the cells they did have died more slowly.

"We're hopeful that incretins may help reboot the pancreas to create more insulin-producing cells and slow the death of existing cells in humans," Cagliero said.

-- *Marni Jameson*

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