

HEALTH

Haley Hernandez, Health Reporter

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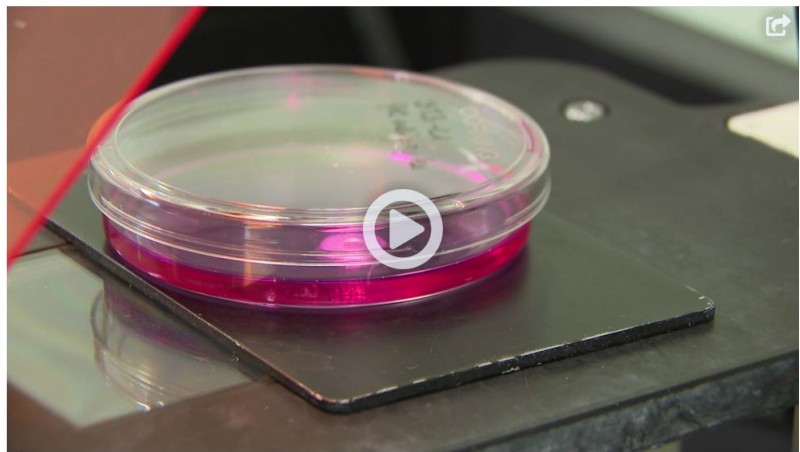
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Pill to shrink your fat in the works



HOUSTON – A UTMB Galveston study may have led researchers to a pill that can shrink body mass. It's currently under review for safety before it can be released to the general public, but it's already proven to lower body fat in animals. Now scientists hope to use it for medical benefits in humans.

"At the end of 10 days, we saw that the mice actually lost about total of 8 percent body weight," Harshini Neelakantan said.

Neelakantan is the scientist working to prove to the Food and Drug Administration that her drug is effective, safe, and could save lives.

"Going after obese and people who are having the type 2 diabetes or pre-diabetic, and so they can really get to that comfortable spot where their blood glucose level normalized or the cholesterol level normalized, now they feel a little better," she said.

Once people feel better then they can make lifestyle changes to further improve their health, Neelakantan said.

Associate professor Stan Watowich explained the study.

"In a two-week treatment with these very fat mice or heavy mice, on treatment they lose weight," he said.

Watowich said what they learned by studying fat cells in the experiment is that there's a protein inside the cells that slows down metabolism. Therefore, the body is fighting you to lose weight.

"You look at the metabolism in the fat and it is at a very low level. So, it's not simply a matter of willpower or anything like that, it is a disease, the body's fighting you from losing weight," Watowich said. "We're hoping to give you another tool to help the body not fight your weight loss attempts as dramatically as it's doing now."

If Neelakantan can get her way, this drug will pass safety tests and be ready for clinical trials in about two years. Their goal is to have the first human patients be those whose life depends on them losing weight.

"There is no magic pill, but this will be a great kick-starting pill and therapy," Neelakantan said.

Many patients do not qualify for lifesaving operations, like a transplant, until they can get to a healthier size. Those are the patients UTMB has in mind for this drug.

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