

Nothing lazy about fat, research shows

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THE FACTSON FAT: Professor Rob Baxter is looking at the process by which fat cells form. Picture: MELVYN KNIPE

FAT - there's more of it and it's even worse than you think.

Researchers at Royal North Shore Hospital say not only are most Australians carrying too much adipose tissue, but the tissue is far more "biologically active" than previously thought.

Now a team from the hospital's Kolling Institute is unravelling the process by which fat cells form.

The researchers have discovered a protein that blocks the formation and activity of fat cells.

"It's still at the basic lab stage," team leader and cell biologist Professor Rob Baxter said.

"The experiments we have done have been with cells from mice but the hope is to provide much more understanding of how human fat tissue forms and, eventually, help to control that process."

Prof Baxter said fat cells were derived from bone marrow stem cells, which "have a choice of turning into fat, cartilage or bone".

He said factors which influenced the formation of bone and cartilage rather than fat, included good diet and exercise - and maybe that protein.

Fat was "not just passive tissue" but an organ that affected important body functions. "Obesity is linked to diabetes because having too much fat around your organs makes you resistant to insulin," he said.

The research team included endocrinologist Associate Professor Stephen Twigg and Dr Sophie Chan.

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