

# Virus suspected of causing obesity

**Researchers found that some overweight people carry a virus but thin people do not.**

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*The Daily Telegraph*

LONDON — A virus infection may be the cause of obesity in up to 20 per cent of fat people.

American researchers have found that some people suffering from obesity carry signs of a virus, while thin people do not.

A specialist said that the findings may mean that obesity will join heart disease

and cancer in the list of conditions which are partly caused by infections.

The American scientists' findings were a follow-up to research showing that injecting chickens with a virus made them fat. The chicken virus is similar to Ad-36, a member of a common family of adenoviruses, many of which cause mild respiratory infections.

The researchers, led by Dr. Nikhil Dhurandhar of the University of Wisconsin, searched for Ad-36 in humans. They examined 105 obese people and found that one in five carried antibodies to the virus, which showed they had been infected with it. In contrast, none

of the 23 thin people examined had antibodies to the virus.

This is very preliminary research and the researchers said that they do not know what the mechanism might be. But they have done a further study to try to find out. Most overweight people also suffer from elevated cholesterol levels, which are partly caused by eating too much saturated fat. The researchers have shown that chickens fattened by the virus did not have these cholesterol levels.

So the scientists compared a group of fat people who had normal cholesterol levels with a group that had elevated

levels. They found that the first group had antibodies to the Ad-36 virus while the second group did not.

The scientists, who presented their work at a biology conference, stressed that the evidence linking the virus with human obesity was so far circumstantial.

Co-researcher Dr. Richard Atkinson, a Wisconsin medicine professor who is president of the American Obesity Association, said that to prove the theory would involve unacceptable tests such as injecting thin people with the virus to see if they become fat.

"But this is tantalizing evidence," he said.