Hunger hormone linked to memory

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Scottish scientists say they've determined the hormone that controls the body's hunger pangs may also boost one's memory.

The Dundee University researchers told the BBC they have found a link between the hormone leptin and the brain's memory and learning process. Leptin controls food intake and body weight and staves off the urge to eat.

One of the researchers, Jenni Harvey, told the BBC: "The hormone leptin, which is known to control food intake and body weight, has been shown to exert a profound influence on learning and memory processes in a region of the brain called the hippocampus.

"Leptin enhances the level of communication between brain cells in the hippocampus in a process known as long-term potentiation," Harvey said, noting previous studies demonstrated people suffering from obesity have defects in their leptin levels and in the LTP process.

The group's findings could, therefore, shed light on how obesity affects learning and memory, she said.

The research is being presented during this week's annual BioScience conference, in Glasgow.